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A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD
BY THE
AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT" &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

AMY HERBERT		in 2 vols.
URSULA		in 2 vols.

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GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD.

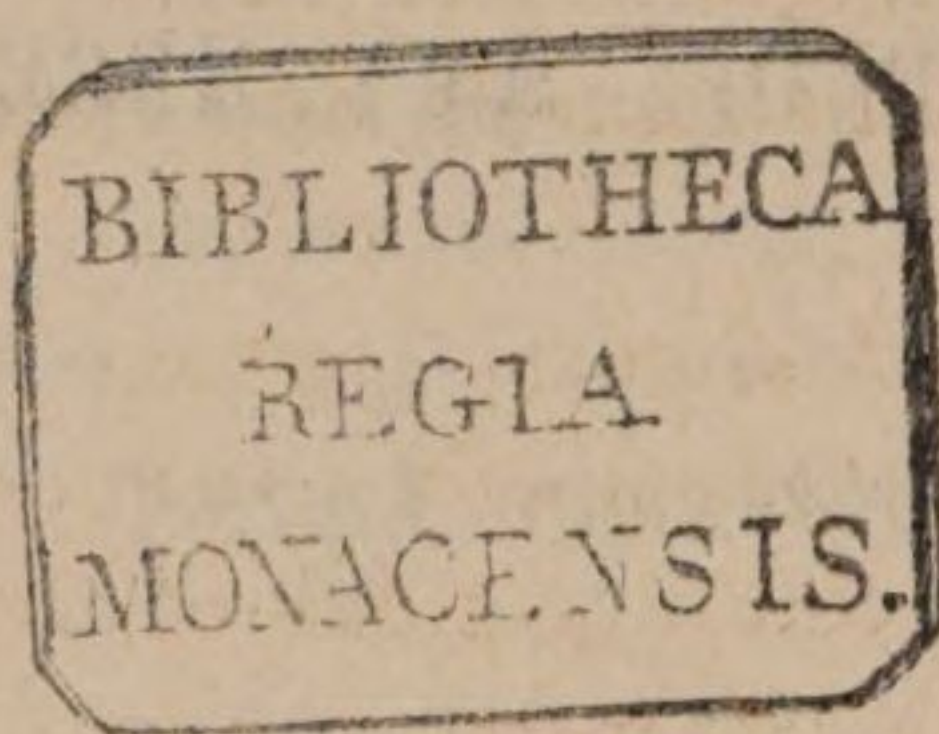
BY THE
AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
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A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Mr. Verney left Myra, he crossed the open square by the church, and lingered in front of the inn.

Part of the strangers' luggage was still in the entrance, and he carelessly examined it, asking at the same time a few questions of the landlord, who, with a cigar in his mouth, was standing by, giving orders for its removal.

They were very short questions, and put with a haughty nonchalance which had the effect of checking any familiarity on the part of the landlord; but Mr. Verney learnt from them that the strangers were travelling alone, and were likely to remain at St. Wolfgang for several days. They had ordered dinner, and one of the ladies had been out, but was just returned; the other was too ill to see anyone.

Mr. Verney replied to this hint by taking out a card, writing a few words upon the back, and desiring that it might be given to Mrs. Tracy instantly, and as the man rather sulkily obeyed, he followed him up the stairs to the ante-room.

The public salon was silent, for the party who had been dining in it had betaken themselves to the open air, and their noisy voices might be heard as they shouted and sang in the garden at the back of the house. The room smelt of smoke; plates, dishes, and drinking cups were left upon the table. There could have been no place less agreeable for a private interview, but it was Mr. Verney's only resource; and after hearing the answer brought back to his note — that the lady would see him as soon as possible — he sat down on a wooden bench waiting her arrival.

The dreamy, indifferent look was gone from his face now, and in its stead there was an expression of struggling feeling which seemed to make the delay even of those few moments almost intolerable to him. He rose at last, and went to the door, as if determined to go without having attained the interview he had requested; but just then Mrs. Tracy appeared from the opposite side of the ante-room, and Mr. Verney, recovering himself, went forward to meet her, with the cool, easy, rather languid manner, which never forsook him in the presence of others.

They met as old and intimate friends, or perhaps not really friends; Mrs. Tracy's face was much more expressive of her feelings than Mr. Verney's, and no one who looked at her could suppose that she was pleased to see him. Surprised and excited she evidently was, and her first words were those common to all persons under such circumstances:

"Where did you come from? How did you know we were here?"

Mr. Verney's reply was short and matter-of-fact. "I have been travelling with some friends. I did not expect you here, but I thought I saw you at St. Gilgen."

"Then you have not come purposely to meet us?" was Mrs. Tracy's disappointed question.

"Purposely? not exactly. But you say nothing of Charlotte."

"She is very ill — worse." They sat down, and there was a pause.

Mr. Verney bent his eyes upon the ground, and said, "How long has she been worse?"

"For about a fortnight. The voyage did her good, and when we landed at Trieste I was hopeful about her. There we had your letter saying that it was better we should not go to England, and since then she has failed rapidly."

"I said what was best for her," he replied; and his voice somewhat faltered. "She needs amusement; in England she would only have care."

"Charlotte does not dread care," said Mrs. Tracy, drily.

"Still it is better she should delay. You must travel during the summer months, and then go to Italy."

"And you will be with us?"

Mr. Verney looked up suddenly. "I thought I

had explained everything in my letter. You heard from me at Vienna?"

"Our only letters have been those which we found at Trieste. I took Charlotte from thence to Venice. It was the only place in which she was interested; and we have travelled by Milan and Innsbruck."

Mr. Verney looked excessively annoyed. "I reckoned upon your going at once to Vienna," he said; "I wrote there and told you everything."

"Everything! And what is everything, Mr. Verney?" exclaimed Mrs. Tracy, indignantly. "Be so good as to let me hear as quickly as possible; Charlotte is very ill, and does not know why I have left her, and I must return to her immediately."

"My dear madam, calm yourself. It is a long story, but I will endeavour to shorten it. Whatever I may say, one thing you cannot doubt, that my affection is unaltered."

"Mr. Verney, I do doubt it," was the reply. "No man with true love in his heart could trifle as you have trifled with that poor child for the last twelve-months. I have said it to my brother-in-law, again and again, and now I say it to you."

"Then you do me a grievous injustice, Mrs. Tracy. As there is a God in Heaven, I love your niece better than I have ever loved, or ever could love, any woman."

"And why is she not your wife?"

"Answer the question for yourself," he exclaimed. "You know all the difficulties, the obstacles which have been put in our way. You know the condition of your brother-in-law's affairs — the risks I have run to help him, and the shattered condition of my health, which, independent of business, necessitated a return to England."

"But you have been in England now several months, and my brother's affairs —"

"Are in a worse condition than ever," interrupted Mr. Verney, moodily.

"Be it so," was the answer. "Then see Charlotte yourself, and tell her the truth."

"I cannot," he exclaimed; "I should kill her."

"You are killing her now; yes, Mr. Verney, killing her, as surely as ever man killed woman, by suspense and disappointment. You urged her leaving India, on the plea that when once in England together, and the health of both re-established, you might jointly consult and arrange for your marriage. That was the pretence — I repeat it, the pretence — it could have been no reality; your present conduct proves it. She obeyed, and now she is told to travel during the summer, and to spend the winter in Italy. Mr. Verney, what does it mean? As you are a man of honour, and a gentleman, I insist upon receiving an explanation."

"As you will, dear Mrs. Tracy. This excitement distresses me; indeed, it is uncalled for. You will see it when I have explained myself."

"God grant that I may!" was the muttered reply, and Mr. Verney continued —

"You know that I came to England partly for health, partly that I might look after your brother-in-law's affairs, in which my own were unfortunately involved. I made no mystery of the matter to you, but I did not wish it talked of to others; neither did I desire my engagement with Charlotte to be generally known. There were family reasons for this; the marriage would be uncongenial to my own relations. I told Charlotte so, and she understood it. They are proud; they would have put obstacles in my path. I hoped to see my way quickly and clearly, but I was disappointed. Stuart mismanaged his business grievously — that I need scarcely say to you. His affairs became more and more desperate. He wrote to me to raise money, and I knew no way of doing it, except as he himself had suggested, by applying to his aunt. It was entirely contrary to my wishes, but I had no alternative; I did apply to her; I suppose you know the result?"

"I know nothing," replied Mrs. Tracy. "We left India before we could have heard anything, even if my brother-in-law had chosen to be communicative, which he never does choose."

"The poor old lady has become imbecile, or worse," continued Mr. Verney. "She had a severe illness, which fell on the brain. She may live for years, but she cannot recover. Thus the assistance

which I thought would be forthcoming is unattainable. Stuart is by this time a ruined man."

"He has long been so," was Mrs. Tracy's quiet reply.

Mr. Verney looked at her in astonishment. Then he said as quietly: "So you may have thought, and so I may have thought, but so the world has not thought — and that makes all the difference."

"The difference as to your marriage with his daughter," said Mrs. Tracy, bitterly.

"You are hard upon me," he replied. "It is a question of possibility; our marriage at the present moment would be madness."

"Mr. Verney, I am not hard upon you," said Mrs. Tracy. "I see your difficulties, and I feel for you — or, I could feel for you if you would be open. You say all this to me — why do you not say it to Charlotte?"

"In her state it would be cruel; but time will help us."

"Time will not help us, and God will not help us, if we do not help ourselves," exclaimed Mrs. Tracy, indignantly. "I tell you, Mr. Verney — and it is the result of a bitter experience — that if there is one wrong greater than another of which men are guilty towards the women whom they profess to love — be they mothers, sisters, or wives, it is that of shrinking from inflicting necessary pain. Tell us the worst, and we can bear it bravely; be true and open with us, and we will honour and obey you

to the very last moment of existence; but, keep back from us anything which we have a right to know, or, what is far worse, give us a half-confidence when we ought to have a whole, and we are paralysed; we lose our trust, and with it our strength. So you will surely find it to be with Charlotte."

"Very possibly," he replied; "and yet it may not suit me to tell the whole. Every man, Mrs. Tracy, is the best judge of the necessities which guide his own conduct."

"Then I am to understand that we are to go on as we have been going on for the last year, in suspense — a suspense which acts as a slow but most sure poison. Mr. Verney, are you a Christian and a gentleman, and can you allow this?"

"I trust I have not lost all claim to either title, dear madam. As a Christian and a gentleman, and, what is more, one who most truly loves your niece, I believe that I am doing that which is best, both for her and for myself."

"Then you do not know her," exclaimed Mrs. Tracy. "Her strongest support is the obligation of duty; and, ill as she is, if you will plainly set before her the impossibility of her marriage at present, and the need that she should devote herself to her father, she will at once face her position, and find a stimulus in the effort she is compelled to make which will strengthen her both physically and morally; only let me entreat you not to be afraid."

"I am afraid," was the reply.

And Mrs. Tracy murmured, in an accent of scarcely concealed scorn, "Yes; I have known that from the beginning."

"I am afraid," he continued, "because I know what a sudden shock might do; and, moreover, I do not see the necessity. You must forgive me for saying that, in such cases as these, a woman's impetuous feeling can scarcely be considered a safe guide."

"The impetuous feeling has endured a long time," replied Mrs. Tracy, sarcastically. "I ask of you merely what Charlotte and I have been asking of my brother-in-law ever since it first dawned upon us that his affairs were embarrassed. Month after month we have begged to know everything, and been told that we did know it, and then found that something was still in the background. So we have both lost all trust and all heart. It is this which has preyed upon Charlotte's health, and brought her into her present condition; and this same distrust has operated in your own case. You are indeed afraid of giving pain, Mr. Verney, but it is pain to yourself. You shrink from inflicting the stroke of the dagger, because you must witness the momentary suffering; but you have no hesitation in administering the slow poison, because you can hide your eyes from the lingering agony."

Mr. Verney rose suddenly. His lip quivered, as

he said, "God forgive me for inflicting either! You must not tell her I have been here."

"And are you going? You refuse to see her?"

"I cannot; I dare not. She shall hear from me."

Mrs. Tracy seized his hand. "Mr. Verney, you must see her! I will be no party to such conduct. She is dying — dying of hope deferred!"

"Which will be hope made hopeless when she has seen me. Take her to Vienna; give her change, comfort. Let her expect my letters — they shall not fail; and, believe me, I will prepare her."

"For what? For the termination of her engagement?"

"I do not say so. I can tell nothing at present. Whatever I resolve upon, her happiness will be my first consideration."

"And why have you come now?" exclaimed Mrs. Tracy.

"Because I acted, as you would act, upon impulse," he replied, bitterly. "I would not have you remain here, and I came to say so."

"Then we have wasted many unnecessary words," was the cold reply. "But your mind may be at rest upon that point. No place can be more unfit than this for a sick girl's resting-place. I find that the friends whom we expected to meet are away. They have let their house to strangers, and we have no inducement to remain. I would, indeed, that I could go this very night."

"Let me know how you can be made more comfortable," exclaimed Mr. Verney. "Tell me in what I can help you. Let me arrange for your journey back to Vienna."

"We do not go to Vienna; I shall take Charlotte to Ischl."

Mr. Verney's countenance changed, as he answered, hastily, "But you must not! It is very undesirable. She ought to be where every comfort can be procured for her. I know nothing of the physicians at Ischl. Promise me that you will return to Vienna."

"I promise nothing, Mr. Verney. I consider myself in no way bound to you."

"But it is madness! I could not answer for the consequences. And you are travelling alone, without a servant!"

"We travel as we can afford. You forget that we are a ruined family, with nothing to depend upon but my own small income."

"I must provide for that," he exclaimed, and his sallow face flushed. "I had no idea of such a state of things."

"You need not distress yourself about us. Charlotte is independent in her habits, and the language is my only difficulty."

"Mrs. Tracy," exclaimed Mr. Verney, "this is cruel on your part. You know how earnestly I desire that Charlotte should have every luxury — how gladly, how thankfully I would provide all —"

"That is fitted for a dying person. Rest of mind may, perhaps, be the one thing needful. Mr. Verney, good night, and good-bye. We are not likely to meet again. I thank you for having at length enlightened me."

He detained the hand which was laid coldly in his, and said hesitatingly: "Let me remind you, my own letters must tell my tale. I trust implicitly to your honour."

Mrs. Tracy merely withdrew her hand, and without another word left the apartment.

CHAPTER II.

"THE Doctor won't come down stairs to-day, Faith," said Mrs. Patty, as she beckoned Faith into the study, and pointed to a pile of books heaped one upon another on the floor. "I think if you and I were to set about it, we might do something towards putting things straight."

"If the Doctor will allow it, ma'am; but he scolded dreadful the last time Betsey and I touched his books."

"The Doctor never scolds, Faith; but he likes to have me present when his books are handled. Poor dear, he is as careful of them as if they were babies."

"More careful a great deal," was Faith's reply, "seeing he would never let a drabby girl wheel his books about in a barrow, as babies are wheeled about in these days. It is a wonder to me that they are not half of them murdered. But, Mrs. Patty, if you will just leave the books to me, I will be special particular about them."

"He won't be satisfied, Faith, and I can't bear to cross him. He thinks a good deal of his books now he is kept upstairs."

"Aye, and to my mind he is likely to think a good deal more," replied Faith. "It will be a long day, Mrs. Patty, before we see him down again."

"Mr. Harrison considers him better," said Mrs. Patty, "and he ate a whole mutton-chop yesterday."

"A chop about the size of a five-shilling piece, ma'am," answered Faith. "As I said to Betsey, there is nothing differs more than chops, and it's no use to deceive oneself about it."

Mrs. Patty sat herself down on a high leather-covered stool, rested her hands on her knees, and looked straight before her.

Faith bustled about the room, taking up papers and writing materials, and putting them down again, moving chairs, and brushing away dust with a duster, and every now and then glancing at her mistress. Not a word was spoken by either, till Faith approached the folio volume of St. Augustine, which lay near the Doctor's desk. Then one large tear rolled slowly down Mrs. Patty's cheek, and she rose and said, "I will dust that myself, Faith," and taking the cloth from Faith's hand she moved it slowly over the book, wiping away every separate particle of dust, and rubbing the cover where it needed no rubbing, Faith all the while standing by waiting for her duster. Seeing at length that she was not likely to have it, she went out of the room to fetch another, and Mrs. Patty sat down again in

the Doctor's arm-chair, and clasping her hands tightly together, murmured something which sounded like a prayer. When Faith returned Mrs. Patty was gone to her own room, but she was there only for few minutes. When she came back she was cheerful again, and said that she had looked in upon the Doctor, and found him comfortable. He wanted to know if the post was come; so she would take him the letters if there were any, and then return and settle what was to be done about cleaning the study.

"The postman ought to have been here ten minutes ago," said Faith. "I wonder why Betsey has not brought the letters in. Not but what master will be better without them, Mrs. Patty. They do but worry him since he has had so much to do for that poor daft Miss Medley."

"It is all settled now," said Mrs. Patty, "or it will be soon. Mr. Cameron and the Doctor have found a person who will be kind to her, and look after her."

"The Doctor has done it you mean, ma'am," said Faith. "Mr. Cameron would have been of little use without him. Anyhow it's a blessing that the poor lady has some friends. People say it was just a Providence that she lost her senses when she did, for she knew so little how to use them that she was always making away with her little money to help her relations out in India. So she would have been

ruined if she had not been stopped in time. But there's always good comes out of evil."

"Always, Faith," said Mrs. Patty emphatically, "but go and ask for the letters; your master is waiting."

Faith brought back a tolerably large packet, which Mrs. Patty looked through, putting aside those which she knew concerned domestic matters, and pondering over others as if doubtful whether or not to take them up stairs. Faith picked up one which had fallen on the ground. "Here is the best of all, Mrs. Patty — a foreign letter. That will be sure to do you good, and the Doctor too."

"From my little Myra," said Mrs. Patty in a tone of quiet satisfaction, and she examined the paper, the post-mark, the stamp, as persons do who have time to wonder at the fact that the letter they now hold in their hands has been only a few days before held in the hands of a person in a foreign land hundreds of miles off. "She writes a good clear hand: that is a comfort. Just take the other letters up, Faith, and let me stay here a minute, and look through this; or stop, I will take them myself, and you go now; never mind the books."

Mrs. Patty was evidently not quite certain of her own mind, but Faith was, so she carried the Doctor's letters to him upon her own responsibility, and left Mrs. Patty to decipher Myra's communication.

"MY DEAREST MRS. PATTY,

"I could make a great many excuses for not having written before, but they will take up my time and my paper, and I feel sure you will not require them. We have settled ourselves at Ischl, an out-of-the-way fashionable place in Austria. I never heard of it till Godfrey talked of it, but everyone in Austria thinks a great deal about it, and as the Emperor is often here, there are hotels, and good houses, and everything to make one comfortable.

"Mamma has been better ever since we left Munich, and we should all like Ischl extremely but for the bad weather. I think I told you that Mr. Verney joined us at Munich. He has been with us ever since, and it has been quite delightful having him. He knows everything, and amuses papa, and he is more kind to me than I can say; and as for Rosamond, I cannot think what she will do without him, for indeed I am quite certain that they like each other extremely, though, perhaps, I ought not to say it, as you told me one day it was better not to talk about such things. Mr. Verney is a great assistance also in enabling us to understand the particular beauty of this country. He has travelled so much that he can compare it with others. He says that it has not the grandeur of Switzerland, but that no other scenery ever gave him such a sense of

enchantment. Berchtesgaden and the König See, to which we made an excursion from Salzburg, were quite perfect. We drove for miles and miles and every change in the position of the hills formed a new view, which one felt as if one would fain carry away, stored up as a treasure of beauty in one's memory. There were foregrounds of rocks, and banks covered with flowers and moss; middle grounds of the most beautiful trees, planted as if they had been especially laid out in a gentleman's park; and backgrounds of cliff and mountain-tops, to say nothing of torrents rushing down the mountains, and the König See, shut in by walls of cliffs, rising so immediately from the water's edge that there was not room even for a pathway. One walk I shall never forget. We were stopping to rest the horses at a little village called Insel; it had been raining all the morning, and we were rather out of spirits and disheartened because of the weather, but at last it cleared up, and Mr. Verney proposed to Rosamond and me to go out with him, and in spite of the mud we set off. Insel is a tiny village in a valley, with great hills, woods, and gorges all round. Glorious effects there were with the clouds clearing off the hills, but the loveliest thing of all was the wood, to which we made our way. It was all I have fancied a wood might be, when I have been reading fairy tales and romances — glades and rocks, most beautiful trees — beeches, sycamores, larches, firs, — and a complete carpet of moss, and flowers, and wood-

strawberries, which it was almost a sin to walk upon; whilst between the branches of the trees and the openings in the wood there were glimpses of the valley and the huge grim rocks towering over it. We sat down on a rock to rest, and, oh! Mrs. Patty, it really was Paradise.

“As Mr. Verney says, ‘What one especially feels here is the lavishness of the beauty.’ It is not that one goes to see a lovely *spot* but a lovely *country*, which is perfect even in its minutest detail. Rosamond declares that I am always sermonising about it, but I hope it is only that I feel thankful for it. Mr. Verney quoted that line from Keats the other day —

●
A thing of beauty is a joy for ever;

and, certainly, the sight of the Bavarian Alps will be a joy to me till the last day of my life.

“I am staying now at a lovely place near Ischl, a house which Colonel Hensman (you know Mrs. Hensman is a cousin of mamma’s) has taken for some months on the lake of St. Wolfgang. It is about seven miles from Ischl. The house was part of a convent and joins the old church, and there is a gallery in it from which one can look down into the church. The grounds are exquisite; so beautiful that the Emperor of Austria and his friends often go over from Ischl to see them. They are close to the lake, and the mountains rise above them — real mountains, one (the Schaffberg) more than

5,000 feet high; but it is very cold here in winter, and, indeed, for a great part of the year, and though there are all kinds of lovely rare shrubs and flowers they can only be left out a very little while. Colonel and Mrs. Hensman brought me over the day before yesterday, and I was to have stayed till Saturday. Mr. Verney came over yesterday for the day, and we were very happy rowing on the lake and walking about the beautiful grounds. He went back to Ischl in the evening, but he said nothing about leaving us, so you may imagine how disappointed I was when this morning, just as Mrs. Hensman was planning what we should do for the day, a messenger came from Ischl saying that I must go back directly, for that all the plans were altered because of Mr. Verney's being obliged to go away almost immediately, and that we were to drive over to Aussee to-morrow morning and sleep, and see some lakes in the neighbourhood, so that Mr. Verney might have the pleasure of being with us, and after that he would go, and Edmund would join us. I feel very ungrateful at not being pleased, but it entirely upsets all my own plans, and Mr. Verney's going is a terrible blank. I cannot help thinking that we shall leave Ischl whenever he does, for papa really does not know how to get on without him. I shall not much care where we go if this should be arranged, for I enjoy everything, and much as I like the idea of staying at St. Wolfgang I do not like being away from our own party.

Ischl itself is very beautifully situated, with mountains all round it, but it is too fashionable to please me. There is an English service on Sundays, held in some room hired by the landlord of the chief hotel, and fitted up expressly for the purpose. This of course is very satisfactory, though papa says it is only a speculation of the landlord's to attract the English guests. The English clergyman sat near us at the *table-d'hôte* the first day we dined there, and told us that the landlord gave him his rooms free of cost, and that he considered it his business to entertain the English guests; and then he began telling us who all the people were who were present. We went to the service on Sunday. There was Holy Communion, and before the offertory, notice was given that the collection would be made to defray the expenses the landlord had incurred in fitting up the room, and we were told besides that the hour for the afternoon service would be altered to suit the landlord's two *tables-d'hôte*. I really felt quite glad that Mr. Verney was not there to hear it, for he cannot help turning such things into ridicule. I can't laugh at them myself, they only give me pain, for they seem so irreverent. That is the one point upon which Mr. Verney and I cannot agree. He never cares about going to these English chapels and services; he says he can be much more devout when he is wandering about amidst beautiful scenery, and I dare say he may be right, only it seems strange. He likes Roman Catholic services, though;

at least, he likes to look on and to hear the music; but then he says plainly that he only goes to them as he does to the opera. Dear Mrs. Patty, these things puzzle me very much, for Mr. Verney must be a good man, he so entirely appreciates everything which is great and noble, and he talks to papa by the hour about plans for doing good in India.

“Tuesday afternoon. — I must finish this, and take it with me to Ischl this evening. I am to go back after an early dinner, which is not quite what mamma wishes; for Rosamond wrote me word I was to return directly in the carriage that was sent for me, and Mr. Verney added a little line in her note, begging me not to delay; but I really could not help it: Mrs. Hensman entreated me so much to stay, and help her to take care of some poor English ladies, who are at a very indifferent hotel in the village, and whom she thinks it right to be kind to. They are an aunt and niece, and they are travelling for amusement, and have come here by a kind of accident, hoping to find some friends. Mrs. Tracy is the aunt, Miss Stuart the niece. The latter is very much out of health, but she is quite fascinating in look and manner. I have been sitting with her this morning in a lovely little pavilion in the grounds. It is fitted up most luxuriously, and has windows all round, which command enchanting views of the lake. Mrs. Hensman had Miss Stuart taken there this morning, carried in a chair, for she is too ill to walk, and then she asked me to go to

her. You know how shy and awkward I am generally; but that is when there is no exact reason for doing or saying things; when I am obliged to put myself forward I can get on pretty well. Miss Stuart was very reserved in manner at first, and rather cold, till something was said about Mrs. Hensman's kindness, and then she was so grateful, her eyes quite sparkled as she spoke of it. They are such lovely eyes, very deep blue, with long eyelashes; and the eyelids droop over them, and make them still deeper and darker. Their expression is very sad; they seem to look out into the far distance as if expecting something which never comes. I could not help thinking, as I sat by her this morning, that if I were a painter, I should like to take her as a model for a picture of "Hope deferred, which maketh the heart sick." I really longed to kiss her and comfort her, but I did not dare to talk about anything but common-place subjects, and these seemed an effort to her. She must have a history attached to her, I am sure; but I am not likely to know it, for I shall scarcely see her again. They were going away from St. Wolfgang directly; but I think now they know Mrs. Hensman, they may stay longer. It is such a comfort to them to be near kind people, and to have the use of the grounds. Mrs. Tracy looks rather bewildered, as if she had no plans and did not know what to do or where to go, and this makes it all the more sad and strange. They seem so very lonely and helpless.

I have had an idea in my mind since I saw them, which seems unnatural, and almost impossible, but which I should like to be quite sure about. You know Miss Greaves had a dear friend whose name was Stuart, and who went to India; and I have fancied whether this young lady could be the same. People turn up so very curiously in strange places. I would have asked Miss Stuart herself, only it might have seemed inquisitive. Please let Juliet and Annette see this letter. I will write to them next time. I send you a very great deal of love, dearest Mrs. Patty, and please give all kinds of respectful and most affectionate remembrances to dear Dr. Kingsbury. How I should like to see him, and talk to him! When you write, pray let me hear all the Yare news. It seems an age since we went away.

“Ever your very affectionate young friend,

“MYRA CAMERON.”

Mrs. Patty laid down the letter, took off her spectacles, sat for a few moments in thought, then put on her spectacles again, and re-read the portion of Myra's communication which referred to Mr. Verney, after which she walked very deliberately up stairs to the Doctor's room.

The old man was sitting in an arm-chair, propped up by cushions. There had been a gradual failing of strength lately, which no one could exactly account for. He felt but little pain, but he had lost

his appetite and energy. The symptoms of a general break up of the constitution were too obvious to be hidden from any eyes but those blinded by affection. Until this day Mrs. Patty had never realised to herself what a change might be at hand. Now, as she entered the room, it struck her how very worn he looked, how his cheeks had fallen in, and how dim his eyes were, and especially how thin and almost white his bony hands had become; and for an instant forgetting the irritable feeling which had made her hasten to him with Myra's letter, she went up to him, and propped up his pillows, and drew his little table nearer to him, and cleared away some papers which were lying upon it, but she could not trust herself to speak to him, till he said —

“Thank you, Patty; I do very well. Have I had all the letters?”

“All which were of any consequence, Doctor, dear. There was one I saw from poor Miss Medley's nurse. What does she say of her?”

“That she is afraid the poor lady grows worse. The change has not been of any use. We must pray, Patty, that God would please to take her home before long.”

“Aye! indeed we well may. It is a sore trial for herself and her friends. And what has been settled about the money matters?”

“Mr. Cameron has not written to say if he will

subscribe, so I must continue to advance what is necessary."

"It is only doing what you have done all your life," observed Mrs. Patty, "advancing for others, and waiting till they think it proper to repay, but there will be the five pounds which Myra told us Mr. Verney would give. I wonder why he wished his name to be kept so secret."

"There may be many good reasons for a man's not wishing his charities to be known," replied the Doctor. "And as to myself, Patty, I shall soon be where it will be no grief to me to remember that I spent twenty pounds to provide a nurse for the afflicted lady."

"If you are doubtful about Mr. Cameron's directions," continued Mrs. Patty, "I can help you now; for I have a letter from little Myra; shall I read it to you?"

"She is a good little girl, Patty, and I shall thank you very much; but I think I will move to the sofa first. I do n't wish to be restless and troublesome, but I am. And lest I should forget it, will you take charge of those clothing-club tickets, and give them to Mr. Baines. I have signed them, but my hand shakes greatly."

So did Mrs. Patty as she gathered up the cards on which were traced the scarcely legible characters which had once been written so firmly. She moved the Doctor to the sofa, refusing to ring for Faith to help her, and then, when she had made him, as he

said, so comfortable that he desired to thank God for it, she sat down by him and read out Myra's letter, to which he listened with the fullest attention, interrupting Mrs. Patty's slow and emphatic reading, whenever he missed a word, with the request that she would be so good as to repeat that once more.

When she had ended, he said, "Little Myra has a feeling heart, Patty, and she is much touched with that poor young lady's sorrow. May God keep her from much of her own, for I fear she would sink under it."

"She is likely to have a good deal, I am afraid, Doctor," replied Mrs. Patty, as she carefully refolded the letter, and placed it in the envelope. "She gives her heart so soon to people who are kind to her, and I do n't know what to say to her about it, because her parents do n't see things as I do. I do wish she did not like Mr. Verney quite so much."

"She is very grateful to him for his kindness, and she will be very fond of him if he marries her sister," replied the Doctor. "It all seems to me, Patty, quite natural, though I could wish that Mr. Verney was more settled in his religious views."

"Ah! Doctor, you are a man, and never see anything but what lies straight before you, which, no doubt, is good and best, and the reason why men go through the world more quietly than women can. But what I should like to know, first of all, is

whether Mr. Verney really does care for Rosamond Cameron, and if he does why he can't speak out at once."

"Myra is discriminating, and appears to have no doubt of his feelings," replied the Doctor.

"But she does not seem to me wise enough to take heed to her own," replied Mrs. Patty.

"I do not understand you, Patty. Even if Rosamond Cameron and Mr. Verney were not attached to each other, as it appears they are, Myra would never care for a man so much older than herself."

"Perhaps not care for him in the way of falling in love with him, though I would never answer for that, as time goes on, if they were thrown much together. But what would be worse than falling in love with him would be that she might take it into her head to marry him from pity and romance. There is a great deal of romance in this letter, Doctor, and I do n't like it. Many a woman has sacrificed her happiness from no stronger feeling."

"Patty, my dear, you trouble yourself about things which will never come to pass. Little Myra is pleased and happy, and I see no reason why she should not be."

"But, Doctor, dear, answer me one question. Should you be satisfied if she were to marry Mr. Verney?"

"By no means. He has no fixed principles, and is much too old. I should consider it most undesirable."

"Then," exclaimed Mrs. Patty, "I do n't quite see how you or anyone can wish her to be pleased, and happy, and full of romance about a man whom you could never bear to see her husband."

"Because I am sure he never will be," was the reply.

"Ah! Doctor, that is looking straight before you; but it strikes me there is something at the side. Suppose she never should marry him, which God grant she may not, and which I do n't pretend to say is likely, seeing he appears to have set his heart on Rosamond; yet if she should go on romancing about him, and admiring him, surely she will become like him."

"Not so, Patty. Little Myra has an honest heart, and a clear head, and God is her guide and protector. She will open her eyes as time goes on; she is a child now."

"And that will be a grievous day," said Mrs. Patty, mournfully.

"It is what we must all come to, Patty, as we travel through this disappointing world."

"It is not what I ever came to," exclaimed Mrs. Patty. "I had my romance of respect when I was a child, Doctor dear, and it was about you, and I have never seen cause to alter it, and it has kept me up and given me strength when things were so trying about me that if it had not been for that, I should have sunk quite. You must not measure women by men, Doctor. They were not made to stand alone,

and when they lean and the reed breaks, ten to one but they fall to the ground; and that is my fear for Myra."

"Nay, Patty. We must not doubt God's Providence over her."

"Yet, Doctor, the old proverb says that God helps those who help themselves. Whereas it strikes me that in these days, fathers and mothers fancy that God will do everything in the way of taking care of their children, and they are to do nothing. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Cameron approve of Mr. Verney. Mrs. Cameron herself as good as told me she would not on any account have Rosamond marry him, and yet she allows them to be together just as much as if they were engaged. The world is a puzzle to me, Doctor, and it grows more so every day."

"Because you do not understand inconsistency, Patty," said the Doctor, and a smile passed over his kind face.

"It may be so," said Mrs. Patty; "yet God knows I can quite understand what the Prayer Book makes one say. I am sure none do more things they ought not to do than I do, and no one oftener leaves undone things which ought to be done. I can't venture to find fault with any on that score."

"Those are sins of infirmity, Patty."

"Anyhow they are sins, and there are enough of them. They are not my puzzle, however, for you see they belong to myself. But what I do n't com-

prehend is how persons can declare that they intend and desire to go one way, and then deliberately turn round and go the other. If Mr. Cameron wishes his daughter to marry Mr. Verney, well and good; but if not, let him keep his door shut against him."

"It is the way of this fallen world in many other cases besides marriage, I am afraid," said the Doctor. "Men say they mean to walk towards Heaven, but they do not the less turn their faces away from it."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Patty, very earnestly, "and so surely, as the Bible says, they are fools, though no one ventures to call them so. But it is very perplexing, Doctor, when clever men are fools, whether in things of this world or the next. Little Myra would be much shocked if I said that I thought Mr. Verney was a fool, yet I can't help thinking so, and some day she will find it out."

"You speak severely, Patty."

"Do I? Yet I would cut off my right hand to help him if he needed it. But truth is truth, and if this world is not to be ours always, as we know it can't be, then to live as if it were is just mad folly, and nothing less. And Mr. Verney may be the cleverest man that breathes as regards knowing about India, and government, and pictures, and music, and all those things which take poor little Myra's fancy, but if he neglects his religion, why, little Johnnie Ford in the Idiot Asylum is more rational;

for when he wants a thing he does go the shortest way to work to get it. Ah! Doctor, you think so, don't you?"

"Perhaps I do," was the Doctor's answer. "But, Patty, there is all the more reason we should pray for him."

"Yes, and for Rosamond and little Myra, too," added Mrs. Patty. "And now, perhaps, I had better put up the letter for Annette and Juliet, or I may forget it."

CHAPTER III.

THAT same day Colonel and Mrs. Verney, for the first time for many weeks, sat down to a *tête-à-tête* dinner in Eaton Place. Mrs. Verney was tired with her gaieties, and had entrusted her two girls to a friend who was to take them to a botanical fête; and Colonel Verney had business which would occupy him all the evening, and which made a six o'clock dinner a necessity.

Mrs. Verney, as usual, threw a little romance over the matter-of-fact matrimonial reality. "So pleasant it is, my dear Colonel," she said, as the dessert was placed on the table, and she began to select the choicest raspberries from the dish before her. "So quiet and soothing. Let me give you just these few raspberries, they really are splendid; they were sent up from Stormont this morning. I almost wish we were going back there to-morrow."

"Thank you, my dear; no more;" and the Colonel took the plate offered him. "Stormont raspberries are always fine. Why don't you go back, if you wish it?"

"Ah! if I could only consult my wishes; but poor Netta and Elise, what would they say?"

"They are very good girls, and would do what you told them," said the Colonel; "and this having a house in town is an awful expense."

"So it is, my dear Colonel; but one must be patient. It won't be needed always. The dear girls will marry, and then we can do as we choose."

"I don't want them to marry," said the Colonel, bluntly; "I like to have them about me. Now they are out of the school-room, and able to do as they like; why am I not to have a little pleasure from them?"

"Certainly; most natural and right; but we must not be selfish. Parents have great sacrifices to make, and you are the last man to stand in the way of your children's good. And that reminds me — have you heard from Charles to-day?"

"I don't see why it should remind you of him, dear. What has Charles Verney to do with your children's good?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Verney, with a gentle smile, and a slight sigh, which were intended to have a great deal of meaning. "Nothing, at least, apparently; but a mother will be anxious, and at one time, I confess, I was afraid that dear Elise's imaginative mind might have formed too vivid a picture of her cousin's talents and superiority. But that is over now. His attachment to Rosamond Cameron is too evident to admit of any mistake."

"His attachment to whom?" exclaimed the Colonel, half starting from his chair.

"Rosamond Cameron, my love," replied Mrs. Verney — she always said "love," when she was afraid of having an outburst of the reverse.

The Colonel sat down again. "I don't understand this, Frances. What do you mean? Is Charles engaged to Rosamond Cameron? Are they going to be married off at once? Why have not I been told of it before? It is very remarkable, very strange, very unfitting" — the Colonel was growing redder and redder, and his vocabulary of indignation was likely to be lengthy. Mrs. Verney bent forward, and pushed a biscuit towards him, and put a few more raspberries upon his plate, but she said nothing; and the Colonel drew up in the middle of his sentence, like a horse who, meeting with no opposition, suddenly arrives at the conclusion that there is no need to run away — and ended with, "Well, my dear."

"I have never heard that they are engaged," was Mrs. Verney's observation, in reply; "but the world talks about it; and as he is gone abroad after them I suppose we must make up our minds that there is something in it."

"But there must not be anything," exclaimed the Colonel; "Charles is not the man; he is too old, and his health is bad; and those stories we heard against him have never been cleared up, my dear. Take my word for it, Cameron won't allow it, and you had better write and tell Charles so at once. I don't

wish to have my nephew rejected, and he will be, as sure as fate."

"Are you not a little rapid, my dear Colonel? It is for Mr. Cameron to find out these objections — supposing they exist — not for us to suggest them."

"I don't desire that my nephew should run his head against a post," continued the Colonel. "When a man makes an offer to a girl, all his antecedents and circumstances are inquired into; and I know Cameron well enough to be sure that he will be sharp and shrewd in the matter, as all men of his stamp are. We shall come to a split — we must. I can't have my nephew insulted and rejected, and people talking as they will talk. Cameron and I have kept apart all our lives, and we must continue to do so; we shall be very rough neighbours if we don't."

"Well, it may never come to anything," said Mrs. Verney, in a tone of indifference, as she leaned her white hand upon the table and gazed at her diamond ring; "but where affections are engaged worldly obstacles soon melt away; and Rosamond Cameron is a very sweet girl."

"She may have come straight from paradise for aught I care," exclaimed the Colonel; "but I don't want her to be Charles Verney's wife."

"Only if she should be so you will receive her kindly."

"I won't receive her at all. I hate Cameron's politics. I hate being mixed up with them. Don't let me have the girl asked again to the house on any account. I won't have it, my dear; remember now what I say — I won't have it."

"Certainly, my love; everything shall be as you wish. I only felt glad myself that Charles seemed to be attracted by Rosamond, because I had heard a rumour of a possible engagement in India, which would not be by any means as satisfactory."

"He is always flirting," exclaimed the Colonel. "For a sensible man, there is no one has made more of a fool of himself in that way than Charles. The wonder is he has not been taken in by an Indian Begum before this;" and as the Colonel laughed at his own suggestion, the angry ruddiness of his cheeks subsided into a quieter and browner hue.

"I wish it may be nothing more serious than a flirtation," said Mrs. Verney. "I have only heard rumours, indeed, but they come from various quarters. Mrs. de Lancy told me when I took Juliet and Annette to school the other day that it was some niece of poor old Miss Medley's. I don't believe, though, it can be; Charles never would mix himself up with any of her family."

"Old Miss Medley! My nephew marry a niece of old Miss Medley's! The world is gone mad!" ex-

claimed the Colonel. "Why, she is the daughter of a quack doctor."

"Once a regular physician, I believe," replied Mrs. Verney.

"Regular physician! regular humbug! Has n't she killed herself with swallowing his atrocious globules? Charles marry her niece! He should never put his foot in my house again if he did; and you may tell him so."

"And that Rosamond Cameron would be preferable," said Mrs. Verney gently.

"I do n't know — I won't say. Why should he marry at all? What is the use of marrying? It only brings trouble into a family. If he must have a wife, let him go to Kamschatka and settle there, and never let us hear any more of him. I hate marrying; it is the ruin of all peace — I hate it!"

"Only, unfortunately, it must be. But, my love, we won't think about it till it comes. Only let us be thankful that, at any rate, we are more likely to have an English lady for our niece than the descendant of a quack doctor."

"Umph!" was all the Colonel's reply. But he did not deny that he had cause for gratitude; and Mrs. Verney was satisfied.

She had reason to be so. By planting in her husband's mind the thought of a possible connection with the family of his political opponent, she had achieved an object which had been weighing upon her mind for many weeks. Why such a connection

should have been a matter of importance, only those who knew Mrs. Verney thoroughly could understand. A watchful mother and a manœuvrer, the fear she had expressed lest Elise should become attached to her cousin Charles, was real. For Mrs. Verney could in her child's case see clearly the objections which were deemed of no consequence where the child of another was concerned. Age, character, and fortune, were all against Mr. Verney. It was very well to idealise him to her friends, and set him upon a pedestal, for a centre to a dinner-party; but to accept him for a son-in-law was quite a different matter; and when the possibility suggested itself to Mrs. Verney's mind, she at once determined to take precautionary measures in time. Not, indeed, that she said to herself that her nephew Charles was a man of indifferent character, indifferent fortune, and indifferent health, and therefore it would be better to provide him with a wife from her neighbour's family than from her own. Mrs. Verney was as plausible to herself as she was to her friends; and she reasoned so sensibly, so philosophically — at times even so religiously — that the inward eye and the voice of conscience must, indeed, have been singularly clear to have discovered wherein lay the self-deception in motive. She said — and it was perfectly true — that the marriage of cousins was very objectionable, and that, to prevent such a catastrophe, it would be well to give her nephew some other object of interest.

This was the ground-work of her course of action, and no fault could be found with it. With regard to Mr. Verney's character — "What the eye did not see the heart was not likely to grieve." Report said that he had been wild and extravagant; but, no doubt, experience had done its work; and at his age, and with his good sense, he was likely to settle down into a very steady estimable man. Moreover — and this was a strong argument — Rosamond was not likely to know or care much about his antecedents. She had no particular principles; she was simply a very pretty, good-tempered, fashionable girl, who would be glad to be married, and might as well marry Charles Verney as anyone else. Health, indeed, was one objection; for if Mr. Verney could not return to India, his income would be most materially diminished, and Mrs. Verney had been so far conscientious upon this point that, although she had passively encouraged the intimacy, she had never taken any very active steps to promote it, until the probability that Rosamond would inherit her aunt's fortune seemed likely to remove out of the way this — in her eyes — only important obstacle. Rosamond, with two thousand a year of her own, would really be a most desirable wife for a man thrown out of an Indian appointment; and then, too, all old associations would be broken off, and Mr. Verney's life might, as it were, be begun anew. With a natural delight in match-making, the temptation to interfere more definitely became too

strong to be resisted; and before he went abroad Mr. Verney had received suggestions and hints and encouragements which — if only his affections had been engaged to the extent which his aunt chose to imagine — must long since have had the effect of bringing affairs to a climax. But — most unaccountable it appeared to Mrs. Verney — from some unknown cause the crisis never occurred. Mr. Verney flirted with Rosamond publicly, and expressed his admiration of her privately; he even went so far as to make her presents, and to receive drawings and guard-chains and purses in return: but he could never be brought to the point of proposal. Mrs. Verney became uneasy. Like other manœuvrers, she cared less for the object than for the fact of success. Rosamond and Mr. Verney might or might not be likely to make each other happy; but if Mrs. Verney had determined they should marry, they must; and therefore she set herself sedulously to find out what hidden obstacles lay in the path. In the course of this inquiry — which was carried on with great skill and profound secrecy — the possibility of what she chose to call an Indian entanglement was suggested, and although no certain evidence was produced — for the information only came from friends' friends who had known Mr. Verney in India — it gave her a stimulus to exertion and a clue to her nephew's conduct that she was far too well-practised in the work which she had undertaken not to use with skill for the

attainment of her own purposes. Within the last fortnight a letter had been written to Mr. Verney, suggesting, in the most insinuating manner, the danger of his prolonging his foreign intercourse with the Camerons. The world, Mrs. Verney said, was beginning to talk. Rosamond Cameron was a most attractive girl, and was already looked upon as an heiress. She had been much admired in London; and Mr. Verney knew that on her return she would be likely to have many and most desirable offers if she were considered disengaged. But, even before she left England, persons were held back by the reports of an attachment — even an engagement — between her and Mr. Verney. This was very unfair. Mrs. Verney put it to her nephew, as a man of honour, whether it was right that such a state of things should continue. If he had no serious intentions he had no right to feign them. He ought at once to leave the family. True, it might be too late. Mrs. Verney would on no account betray confidence; yet she could not but fear, from what she had seen and heard, that Rosamond's feelings had already been excited to a degree which might be very dangerous to her happiness. She was upon the surface a sweet, bright — some might even say a thoughtless — young girl; but such apparent buoyancy of spirits often concealed great capacities of suffering. Mrs. Verney entreated her nephew no longer to trifle in this matter. He might possibly have been influenced in his delay by the very ad-

vantages which a marriage with Rosamond Cameron offered. A wife, beautiful, accomplished, perfect in temper, fascinating in society, a member of a good family, and having the almost certainty of two thousand a year of her own, was certainly not to be met with every day; and a man of very refined feeling might well hesitate before he ventured to ask for such a treasure. But morbid scruples would, in the end, be injurious to all parties. And it was due to Rosamond, and due also to her parents, and to Mr. Verney's own character — that attentions without meaning should no longer be suffered to stand in the way of her prospects for life. Mrs. Verney concluded with ardent wishes for her nephew's happiness, and an assurance that, whatever might be his decision, she should always be most affectionately interested in his welfare.

The letter was written and despatched; but it lay rather heavy on Mrs. Verney's mind — perhaps it a little burdened her conscience. One thing was certain — she shrank from mentioning the subject to which it referred to her husband. Colonel Verney had great and very serious faults, but they were of a less insidious character than his wife's. He was more honest-hearted, more true and Christian in his principles. Mr. Verney not being a man whom he could approve of for his own daughter, he would have scorned the thought of encouraging his attentions to Rosamond; and this his wife perfectly well

knew. Again and again in life her schemes had been interfered with by her husband's blunt and sometimes very rough and awkward honesty. But, in this instance, his sense of the undesirableness of such a marriage for Rosamond would be strengthened by his own prejudices. He might bear with Mr. Cameron socially, but an actual connection would be entirely opposed to his views and interests. Yet he must be prepared for the contingency; and this could only be done by accustoming him to the idea gradually. A sudden announcement of Mr. Verney's engagement (supposing it to exist) would almost inevitably produce an outbreak of incautious anger and surprise, the consequences of which it would be impossible to foresee. Mrs. Verney had pondered this matter well for several days; and the result was the conversation which had just passed, and which had been much more favourable to her wishes than she could have ventured to anticipate. The Colonel was never a very reasonable or reasoning being. His one great weakness — violent temper — put him continually at a disadvantage with persons who could be cool and bide their time; and Mrs. Verney knew full well that, if she could excite his indignation at the prospect of being connected with the "quack doctor," he would accept whatever might be suggested in its stead, without pausing to weigh objections which, in calmer moments, might seriously interfere with her projects. She had calculated

well and wisely. The Colonel sat in his arm-chair and drank his port wine and stormed mentally at "Old Miss Medley;" and when he thought of Rosamond felt only — as his wife intended he should feel — that it would be a great gain for them all to have nothing worse than a Cameron instead.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Myra drove back to Ischl, in compliance with the order she had received, it was in a spirit of no very perfect submission or good temper. Principles sometimes change suddenly, but practice follows but slowly after them. Everything had gone wrong on that particular day. She disliked the upsetting of her plans; she was very sorry to leave St. Wolfgang; she was disappointed at not seeing more of Miss Stuart; and, more than all, she dreaded on every account travelling without Mr. Verney's help and companionship. As a climax, instead of having a pleasant drive in an open carriage with Colonel and Mrs. Hensman, she was told at the last minute that they were excessively sorry, but that most unexpectedly they were compelled to go in another direction to see a friend who was taken suddenly ill, and that the only mode of conveyance they could find for her would be a little country vehicle, half chaise, half cart, which would be driven by their servant. So Myra jolted over the rough road, and had scarcely heart to admire the scenery, even when after a drive of seven miles they

came to the summit of a hill, at the foot of which lay the small town of Ischl, encircled by mountains and forests near and distant, a torrent-river rushing by it, and trees and cliffs breaking the outline of the foreground.

Sorrow may be soothed by the beauty of nature, for sorrow, like nature, comes from God, and is sacred; but temper is human, and refuses to submit to its influence. Myra suffered at that moment from a fit of discontent, which might have suited the days gone by; and, in order to indulge it, conjured up every possible form of disagreeableness which might be expected to await her at the Hotel Baur—her mother's complaining illness, her father's cold strictness, Rosamond's utter want of comprehension and sympathy, and Mr. Verney's moodiness. The first words she heard from Conyers, who met her at the entrance of the hotel, were by no means encouraging.

"Why, Miss Myra, how late you are! Master has been waiting dinner for you, and he is so angry. He thought you would have been here two hours ago."

"It was very foolish to wait," said Myra impatiently. "I have dined."

"How vexatious. And your mamma was to have had a drive somewhere this afternoon, but it has been put off because of dinner and your not being here; and now she has had one of her faints,

and Miss Cameron and Mr. Verney are just gone out somewhere — I am sure I don't know where. Why didn't you come, Miss Myra, when you were sent for?"

"I came as soon as it was convenient, Conyers," replied Myra haughtily. "Will you be so good as to have my trunk taken to my room?"

Conyers moved sulkily away, and Myra went a few steps upstairs; then something seemed to strike her with self-reproach, and she came back.

"Is mamma ill from having been kept waiting, Conyers?"

"I believe it is worry more than anything else, Miss Myra. She thought something had happened as you did not come."

Myra made no answer to Conyers, but went immediately to Mrs. Cameron's room. Her tone was humble and affectionate, as she said how sorry she was, how thoughtless she had been, how much she hoped that her mother was not seriously vexed.

"I have been nervous, my dear, but never mind; it is only for your father; he has been kept waiting for dinner."

"I thought they would dine at the *table d'hôte*, and so it would not signify," said Myra.

"No; they had a fancy for a private dinner to-day. I think it was Mr. Verney's wish, or Rosamond's; but go and get ready, my love. Don't think

about me; I shall do quite well. I hope you have enjoyed yourself."

Myra could scarcely say she had. It was so chilling to be received as if the breaking up of her pleasant little visit was of no consequence. She turned away pettishly, went to her room, and took off her bonnet and cloak, brooding all the while over she scarcely knew what; and then, as she looked at her watch, recollected that in packing and departure the morning had gone by without allowing time for the serious reading and prayer to which she was accustomed. There was no time now; at least, none which would be sufficient: but Myra's sensitive conscience was touched. She felt herself thoroughly put out and wrong. She was thinking of nothing and no one but herself: she was prepared to take offence before it was offered. A little more yielding to weakness and perverseness, and the old uncontrollable ill temper would be upon her. Conyers knocked at the door.

"Dinner is on the table, Miss Myra, and master won't wait another instant."

Prayers may take but one moment. Myra's was scarcely longer, but after it came the struggling, earnest, almost physical effort to resist the self which was striving for the mastery; and Myra's smile of apology as she met her father on the staircase was so sweet that Mr. Cameron's usual indifferent sternness of manner melted before it, and, instead of

finding fault, he stopped to kiss her, and said that "he did not like her being away. They were none of them comfortable without her." It was the first time that Myra had ever realised to herself the place she was gaining in the esteem and the affections of her home.

The conversation at dinner turned upon the plans for the next few days. Mr. Verney took part in it; but his thoughts were evidently elsewhere. This jarred upon Mr. Cameron, and it was only by the exercise of his punctilious politeness that he prevented himself from showing his annoyance. Myra found herself obliged to take a prominent part in proposing and settling what was to be done, if it were only to please her father. She had studied Ischl and its vicinity in the guide-book as a matter of information, and in spite of Rosamond's ridicule and Mr. Verney's assurance that whenever he wanted to go to sleep he always took a dose of "Murray." Her father kept her with him after dinner was over, with a view to some final discussions with the landlord, and the help of her German knowledge; Mrs. Cameron had dined in her own room; and Rosamond and Mr. Verney left the saloon together.

At the head of the staircase Rosamond stopped, and said she must go to her mother. Yet she lingered; and as Mr. Verney opened the door into the private sitting room she entered, whilst he followed. There was a balcony before the window over-

hanging the street. Rosamond went out, and still Mr. Verney accompanied her. Rosamond remarked lightly, "One should sleep through last days; they are so weary."

"Sleep and dream?" said Mr. Verney. "That might be worse than waking."

"No," replied Rosamond, "because anything that is disagreeable in a dream becomes a pleasure when we wake up from it."

"And the memories of these last days may become a pleasure by and by then," said Mr. Verney.

"Oh yes, they may; very likely they will. I have no doubt they will to you."

"Why no doubt to me?"

"Because you like to view things poetically, and you will easily make a romance of them."

"And what shall you make?" he inquired eagerly.

"I? oh nothing. I shall" — Rosamond paused — "I shall forget them."

"That is not flattering."

"But it may be wise;" and Rosamond turned away her head and gazed down into the street.

Mr. Verney drew nearer. "When things are indifferent to one, there can neither be wisdom nor the reverse in forgetting them."

Rosamond was silent.

"And these last days will be matters of indifference to you?" he continued.

"Did I say so?" and Rosamond looked up in his face and smiled.

That must have been a very prosaic and cold temperament which could resist such a smile. And Mr. Verney was lonely at heart — weary of the world — hopeless of the realisation of what had once been his day-dream of happiness with Charlotte Stuart; above all he had that morning received his aunt's suggestive letter, and the insidious words were indelibly impressed upon his memory. "A wife, beautiful, accomplished, perfect in temper, fascinating in society, a member of a good family, and having the almost certainty of two thousand a year of her own, is not to be met with every day."

The generality of men are not deliberately treacherous. It is opportunity which is their snare: and when Mr. Verney answered Rosamond's smile, by an eager outpouring of flattery and excited feeling, he no more thought whither he was tending than the man who on a sudden impulse has cast himself into the rapid current of a river meditates upon the ocean in which his course is to close.

It was Rosamond who thought — Rosamond who drew him on — Rosamond who smiled, and sighed, and pretended that she would not and must not hear — Rosamond who at length blushed, and in a subdued voice said, "I did not think you so cared for me."

What man could escape from such a snare? Mr. Verney's answer was a protestation of unwavering affection; and in ten minutes from the time he entered the room he was engaged.

CHAPTER V.

RAIN still! It had rained almost without intermission from the time that Myra left St. Wolfgang. Why then, as she asked herself, must they leave these comfortable quarters at Ischl, and establish themselves at a little country inn at Aussee? Why especially, should Mrs. Cameron be subjected to such a risk? Simply because Rosamond and Mr. Verney insisted upon it. It was certain to clear, so said the latter, and he must leave Ischl — he must see Hallstadt and Gosau — he must part from his friends unless they could accompany him. And the “must” was uttered so earnestly that everyone was compelled to believe it.

They left Ischl in the interval between two storms, when the clouds were lifted from the hills sufficiently to satisfy Mr. Cameron that he was not acting quite madly. And at Aussee the rain poured down again, and all that could be attempted was a stroll in the evening along the banks of the Traun, undertaken by Mr. Verney, Rosamond, and Myra. They had often been thus together before and to Myra it seemed quite natural that her sister and Mr. Verney should walk apart, and that she should be

allowed to stray at will, gathering wet flowers, and joining them whenever she felt inclined.

She saw they were earnest in conversation, and Mr. Verney's manner occasionally seemed to her excited almost to irritability, but Myra was by nature unsuspecting. She took her evening walk, and spent the hour after tea in conversation and drawing, full of plans for the next day which was to bring a bright sun and an expedition to the Lake of Hallstadt, without once thinking that any secret was kept back from her.

When she wished Mr. Verney good night, she said, with her usual openness of manner, "One more day, and then it will be good-bye; and we shall be so sorry; but I know you will come back."

He started, and said quickly, "How do you know it?"

And Myra answered, "Because we all care for you, and you care for us." And then there was an expression in his face which perplexed her. It was as if she had said something to displease him, and she went to bed wondering whether she had been wrong, because as the words were uttered, she had thought of Rosamond, and perhaps any such allusion was unfitting.

Sunshine greeted them the next morning; but it was a fitful sunshine, gleaming at intervals, and Mrs. Cameron was afraid to trust it. She proposed to go back to Ischl with Conyers, and leave the rest

of the party to explore Hallstadt, and either sleep at Gosau, or return to Ischl in the evening, as they might think fit. The proposal was made in the tone of a martyr, as Mrs. Cameron's self-sacrifices generally were; and in consequence no one except Myra appreciated it. Whilst the horses were being ordered for herself and Rosamond, she stole quietly to her mother's side and whispered a wish that they could all remain together, and undertake some less fatiguing expedition; but she was cut short by Rosamond, who happening to overhear her, declared that the arrangements were quite made, and that it was much too late to think of any change. If they did not set off at once they should miss everything: a fact which Mrs. Cameron accepted without questioning, though she said mournfully: "It does not signify much where I go, my dear, my eyes are so bad I can't see, and I daresay I shall have a headache before the day is over."

"Mamma, I must go back with you," was Myra's answer. "You can't be left to Conyers."

"It is but for the day," said Rosamond. "We shall only make papa angry if we alter the plan."

Again Myra repeated, "Dear mamma, they will do quite well without me."

And Rosamond very gently pushed her towards the door, saying, "You will be late, as you always are." Myra's heart was set on Hallstadt, and all the more resolutely she lingered. But there was no help from her mother, who could only say in a

dreary tone; "My love, go; they all wish it, and your father will be displeased, and I am accustomed to be left."

The last words would, as Myra well knew, be a text for lamentation and complaint for many days to come, but she could do no more, and hurried away, followed by Rosamond, who with a good-humoured patronage insisted that she would keep them all waiting, and leave half her things behind her if she was not looked after; and upon this pretext contrived to remain with her till the horses were at the door, so as to leave no moment for thought and fresh suggestions which might interfere with her own wishes.

Myra, with her over-scrupulous conscience, was a little inclined to worry herself at first, lest she had not made all the effort for her mother which she ought, but her natural good sense suggested that self-accusations which interfere with present duty are always better put aside. So she devoted herself to her father, feeling a little penitential satisfaction in the fact that she would much have preferred riding by Rosamond's side and listening to Mr. Verney, who was full of excitement at the beauty of the pass between Aussee and Hallstadt, which they began to ascend almost immediately upon leaving the former village. Again and again he called out to Myra to stop and admire the points from which they could look far down the side of the mountain, and watch the effects of the sun-light gleaming through the

trunks and branches of the dark pine forest; but Rosamond never allowed him to leave her, and even when he walked on a little way with Mr. Cameron, had always an excuse ready to bring him back — the saddle had slipped, or would slip, or the road was narrow, or the mule went too near the edge; something there always was to retain him near her; with or against his will it would have been impossible from his countenance to decide. He was imperturbable and impenetrable as ever.

They descended to Obertraun, a small village about half a mile from the lake of Hallstadt, and here clouds began to settle upon the tops of the mountains, sinking gradually lower and lower, with that occasional dispersion and swift gathering together again which is so trying and dispiriting to travellers in a mountainous district.

The lake of Hallstadt looked extremely gloomy. The snow was lingering on the summits of the precipitous pine-clad mountains, which close it in at its southern extremity, and the nearer cliffs descended so abruptly to the shore as, in one part, to leave only sufficient space for a foot-path. In winter, the inhabitants of the village of Hallstadt never see the sun above the highest mountain tops, and even now, in the middle of summer, the grey mists and the wall of jagged rocks cast a twilight shadow over the deep dark waters, disturbed by the ominous ripple of an approaching storm.

A boat was moored under a shed against the

shore; a short row would carry them across the lake to Hallstadt. There was no comfortable shelter where they were, and Mr. Verney urged that they should go. Mr. Cameron demurred, and a short argument arose, in the midst of which the heavy rain-drops began to fall, and all hurried towards the shed. Rosamond and Myra seated themselves in the boat, and had scarcely covered themselves with cloaks when a torrent of rain and hail pelted and dashed into the lake, and a gust of wind rushing through a gap in the hills, nearly broke the umbrellas with which they were trying to screen themselves from the streams which assailed them on all sides. The roll of thunder and the flash of lightning followed, and Rosamond looked round in terror. Mr. Cameron was arguing with the guides, who, he thought, were endeavouring to cheat him, and an earthquake would not have disturbed his attention. Myra was leaning forward over the boat lost in admiration at the effects of the storm on the mountains. Another dazzling gleam lit up the lake, and a faint scream burst from Rosamond, and as she looked imploringly to Mr. Verney for protection, he put his arm round her, and some very endearing expression escaped him. At that instant Myra turned, her eye met Mr. Verney's, and for once the colour rushed to his cheeks. The expression of surprise in Myra's face was unmistakable. She turned round, drew her cloak round her, and sat facing him, but perfectly silent. He made a trifling remark, and Myra just

answered him, but that was all. Rosamond was conscious of nothing but the thunderstorm. At each successive flash of lightning, she renewed her little screams, and at last entreated to leave the boat, and nothing but Mr. Cameron's stern command kept her in her place. Yet there was no real cause for terror. The lightning was merely sheet lightning at a distance, and the only danger was that of being wet. Mr. Verney insisted that Myra should come and sit between him and her father, that so she might be more protected; and Myra did as she was ordered, keeping, however, close to Mr. Cameron, and continuing so silent that the latter gave her credit for sharing Rosamond's alarm.

It was all over in a quarter of an hour. The clouds were lifted from the hills, the blue sky appeared overhead, and a line of brilliant light streamed over the lake. Rosamond's spirits rose as quickly as they had fallen, and as the boat pushed off from the shore, and cliff after cliff broke from the mist and stood forth in savage grandeur, she became enthusiastic in her admiration, and declared that it was quite worth while to have endured the storm and the terror for the contrast of the beauty which succeeded it — a remark to which Mr. Cameron gave the short answer: "It may have been worth while for you, my dear, but it was certainly not worth while for us." So silence fell upon the party, and even when they passed below Rudolph's tower — perched on a projecting rock — and the village

of Hallstadt, nestling below it, came in sight, no one expressed satisfaction except Mr. Cameron, who remarked that it was a good thing they had not been detained longer, as they should have time now to order dinner and take a walk whilst it was getting ready.

The village was straggling and dirty, as the generality of such secluded villages on the continent are; the peasants who inhabited it had no standard with which to measure themselves, but the inn was of a superior stamp, thanks to the travellers who in the summer time frequented it.

Two gentlemen had already taken possession of the long low saloon, into which Mr. Cameron's party were ushered, and, early though it was, were just sitting down to dinner. English exclusiveness suggested to Mr. Cameron the necessity of having another room for themselves, but the idea was negatived by Mr. Verney, who seemed relieved at the prospect of having anyone to converse with besides his stiff and silent companions. Mr. Cameron left the room to try and find mules or donkeys, which would carry Rosamond and Myra to the Strub waterfall, and Mr. Verney hearing one of the strangers accidentally mention Gosau, went up to him, and began to make inquiries about the distance, the roads, and the accommodation.

In a few minutes he returned to Rosamond and Myra, who were standing by the window, and said: "I am afraid from what I hear we shall be obliged

to alter our plans. The inn at Gosau will never do for you and your father. These gentlemen are just come from it, and say the accommodation is wretched." Myra made no reply; Rosamond declared that she did not in the least care for comfort, she could sleep anywhere. "But your father cannot," continued Mr. Verney, "and the clouds are gathering again; we shall have more rain. I can't but think you will do better to see what you can here, and then drive back to Ischl."

"And you?" exclaimed Rosamond.

"I must go to Gosau as I had settled; and from thence I shall make my way to Golling. I have not fixed upon my route afterwards."

Rosamond's face clouded with disappointment, as she answered, rather pettishly: "I see no must in the case, except your own will."

Mr. Verney glanced warningly at the strangers, for Rosamond had spoken quite loudly enough to be heard, and Myra noticing this moved away; a rapid eager conversation ensued, in the midst of which Mr. Cameron came back with the information that the mules were ready, and dinner was ordered. They might go to the waterfall, and by the time they returned it would be ready.

The road led up one side of a deep wooded ravine. Mr. Cameron and Myra went first, Rosamond and Mr. Verney followed; but as the little guide who attended Myra's mule stopped to point out the line in the stupendous cliff opposite to them,

which, as he said, marked one of the paths by which the Dachstein could be ascended, Mr. Verney left Rosamond and came forward to question the boy about the mountain, and when they went on again Myra found herself the foremost of the party, and Mr. Verney beside her. Her mule moved more quickly than Rosamond's, and though she several times proposed to stop, in order that the others might come up with them, Mr. Verney would not attend to her wishes. He hurried her on till they were a considerable distance in advance, only pausing when they stood in front of the beautiful waterfall, which tearing through a narrow ravine, falls boiling and tossing from a height of 240 feet into a hollow of the rock, rising again in foam and dashing on its impetuous course to the lake; whilst another stream at its side descends continuously in a sheet of light vapoury spray. It was the first fine waterfall that Myra had seen, and breathless with awe and delight, she hung over the abyss, lost in the overwhelming perception of whirling movement, which it seemed had known no beginning and could know no end.

Mr. Verney's voice recalled her from her abstraction. "Myra, you are angry with me."

Myra turned round, and as the colour mounted to her cheek, answered gravely, and shyly, "I have nothing to be angry about, Mr. Verney."

"Yes," he said, "you have, or you would have

if you were not mistaken in what you think; but, Myra, Rosamond and I are engaged."

The smile on Myra's face was like the glitter of a sunbeam, and as she held out her hand to Mr. Verney in the fulness of her relief and satisfaction, she said, "Oh! thank you, thank you. I am more happy than I can say. I hoped, — I thought" —

"That I could not, under any circumstances, forget propriety," he said, with a faint laugh. "I am grateful to you for the doubt. But, Myra, I must say a few more words. Can you not move on with me?" and as Rosamond and Mr. Cameron came in sight, he went nearer to the waterfall, and placed himself so that the rush of the torrent effectually prevented their conversation from being overheard.

Myra followed him eagerly, but when she looked at him, it was evident to her that he was by no means as completely at ease as herself. "We are engaged," he repeated, hesitatingly. "But it won't do to talk about it."

"Not to people generally, of course," said Myra.

"Not to anyone."

"Except papa and mamma?"

"Not to anyone."

Myra glanced at him as if doubting that she had heard aright.

"You must put faith in me," he continued hurriedly. "It is impossible for me now to explain the

reasons of our secrecy, but I would not have burdened you with the knowledge of our engagement if I had not seen that you suspected it."

"I wish you had not told me," exclaimed Myra, "except — no I do n't wish it. Mr. Verney, you must know best." The words were uttered in the quick determined tone by which persons so often endeavour to hide from themselves a doubt.

"Of course I must know best," was the reply, "and what is more, Myra, I know what you will do to help your sister."

"I! but if you are engaged you cannot want help."

"You will write to me, I am sure, and tell me how you are getting on, and I shall write to you; and if I enclose a note for Rosamond, you will not object to give it to her quietly, without making any remark."

Instead of replying, Myra moved some steps towards the spot where her father and Rosamond were standing. Mr. Verney followed and detained her.

"It would be unkind, Myra," he said, "to let scruples interfere with a little act of good-nature to Rosamond. You know quite well that your father always receives the letters, and knows my handwriting. It would be out of the question for me to write to her without his noticing it, and there are good and substantial reasons why, at the present

moment, our engagement should be kept to ourselves. I hate asking such a favour. I am putting myself entirely in a false position by it; but the fact is, that Rosamond would not do it. She declared you would never consent, and she had made up her mind to spend weeks, perhaps months, without hearing from me; but as I told her, such scruples were too absurd, and I would not hear of them. Of course if you do n't choose to gratify her there is nothing more to be said, we must accept what cannot be avoided."

It was the first time that Myra had ever seen him seriously annoyed, and she actually trembled at the proud gloom which overspread his face. The anger of a man, and that man Mr. Verney, was very terrible to her; and the sense of her weakness, her inferiority in age, judgment, knowledge of the world, in everything which can give the right of forming an independent opinion, pressed upon her overwhelmingly. She said falteringly, "May I not think about it?"

"Certainly, certainly; if such a trifle requires thought," and he turned contemptuously away.

That was worse to Myra than anything. She could have borne to argue the point with him, and perhaps she might have held her ground against him, but she could not bear his scorn. The romance of admiration which she had indulged turned, as it were, against her, and as she remounted her mule and rode slowly back towards the inn, all

the powers of sophistry which she possessed, — and from the peculiarly metaphysical turn of her mind they were by no means slight, — were enlisted against the instinct of conscience. Mr. Verney must know best, he must be right; that was the premiss from which Myra drew all her conclusions. No doubt there were cases in which concealment upon such subjects was a necessity; she could not be the judge whether this was one of them, and to attempt to decide the point was taking upon herself a responsibility which did not belong to her. If her father and mother so evidently trusted Mr. Verney, and approved of him, there could be nothing wrong in following his guidance; and there was not the slightest doubt that he would in the end be able to explain everything satisfactorily. If on the other hand, she refused, Rosamond would be wretched and moody, and her temper would re-act upon Mrs. Cameron. The advantage which had been derived from the journey would be neutralised, her father would be disappointed, and everyone would be miserable. And it was not as if Mr. Verney was a young man. At his age he must be able to judge what it was allowable and right to do. To dispute his wishes would be like disputing the wishes of her father. It was all very plausible; the only reason for doubt arising from the fact that the case required so much argument before Myra could make up her mind. She continued to weigh the *pros* and *cons*, always putting her will into the ba-

lance opposite to the side for which she happened at the moment to be contending, until she really did not know what she desired, or thought, or proposed to do, but left herself simply at the mercy of circumstances. Very weak it was, very unlike Myra, but Mr. Verney's influence was the magnet which controlled both conscience and intellect.

They reached the Hallstadt inn, and found dinner waiting — a good dinner, and well dressed — a circumstance soothing to Mr. Cameron, and rendering him less sensible to the annoyance of the weather, which had again so clouded over, that Mr. Verney's suggestion as to giving up the expedition to Gosau, was acknowledged by all to be the only thing practicable. Even Rosamond agreed, but her eyes glistened with tears, perceived both by Myra, and Mr. Verney, but absolutely unnoticed by Mr. Cameron, who had betaken himself to a careful study of "Murray," in order to persuade Mr. Verney that it was an absurdity to think of going, as he had proposed from Gosau to Golling, and that it would be much better to return with them to Ischl. Mr. Verney had that elastic India-rubber will which, by giving the impression of yielding, serves to occupy time and attention, and in the end is found precisely where it was at the beginning. He talked to Mr. Cameron till the moment arrived when it was necessary to start, and even when they seated themselves in the boat which was to carry them to a spot called Gosau Mühl, where they were to separate, no

one could have undertaken to say what he finally intended to do. To Myra he was very chilling, and this appearance of indifference was so painful to her that she could not resist placing herself near him, in the hope of having an opportunity for asking him to forgive and understand her. So, at least, she said to herself, though what there was to forgive when she had by no means resolved to refuse his wish, was more, perhaps, than she could have told.

After a short row, they landed near a solitary house — the mill — at which they had been told that conveyances would be found to take them either to Ischl or Gosau, as they desired; and a carriage there certainly was, but neither horse nor mule to draw it.

Travellers to Gosau had already carried off all that were to be had, though Mr. Verney was told that a *char-à-banc* would be returning to Gosau in two hours' time, in which he might possibly find a seat. As for Ischl, it seemed as impracticable to get there as it was to procure accommodation at the mill. Rosamond and Myra would gladly have changed their plans again, and taken the risk of the wretched Gosau inn, but Mr. Cameron's dignity was lowered by what he called the deception which had been practised upon him. An animal of some kind he was resolved to have, and after a lengthened discussion, the boatman who had brought them to the Mühl was sent back to Hallstadt for a mule, whose "local habi-

tation" he professed himself acquainted with; the said mule having to traverse the distance between Hallstadt and the mill by a footpath along the shore of the lake. As this was likely to be a very slow proceeding, nothing remained but to rest in a little wooden room at the landing place, or walk up and down the level green space which formed the shore at this extremity of the lake, and watch the clouds hovering over the cliffs on the opposite side. Myra had no heart to sketch — no heart to talk. The cloud upon her spirits was as heavy as the cloud gathering over her. She drew near Mr. Verney, but he took no notice of her; if he did speak, it was in a tone of matter-of-fact indifference which was much worse to her than anger. He did not even talk much to Rosamond — perhaps he was afraid of attracting Mr. Cameron's attention. Full an hour passed in this wearisome way, and then Mr. Verney came back from a short walk to the mill, with the intelligence that a man and a mule were in sight.

"Joyful news!" said Mr. Cameron, in a solemn voice; an exclamation which received no echo. "And, of course, you will come with us now," he added, addressing Mr. Verney. Both Rosamond and Myra looked up anxiously.

"Thank you, no; I do n't think I can. The Gosau *char-à-banc* will be here directly. Can I collect anything for you? Are you certain everything was taken out of the boat?" This question was put to Myra, and Mr. Verney drew near to listen to the

answer. Poor Myra really could not speak. Most heartily ashamed of herself she was, but tears were streaming down her cheeks, as she turned aside her head and bent down over her carriage-bag. Mr. Cameron left the wooden room and stalked along the shore, evidently supposing that his own hasty movements would quicken those of the mule. Rosamond was standing apart; and Mr. Verney said to Myra coldly, "I am sorry to see you so distressed."

"If you would only forgive me;" and Myra strove hard to recover her self-possession.

"There is nothing to forgive. I respect scruples, however weak I may think them."

"If I were quite sure this was a scruple," said Myra.

"Are you not sure? I can have no doubt of it. But do n't let us talk any more about it." Mr. Verney was going to move away.

"Please stay, please. — Yet you want to talk to Rosamond, I know; and she is dreadfully unhappy."

"No doubt; but it cannot be otherwise. I must find, however, some mode of communication."

"Yes, some; only not through me."

"So as to avoid bringing you into any difficulty."

"Oh! Mr. Verney; it is not that I care for."

"Indeed! I fancied it was."

"Difficulty? I would brave any difficulty to help you."

"Would you?" He paused and looked at her steadily.

"It is a question of right and wrong," said Myra.

"Oh!"

"Won't you believe me? Do you not give me credit for thinking it so."

"I am bound to do so."

"But bound or not, Mr. Verney, if you knew half the pain it is to say no — when you have been so kind to me."

"My dear child," he exclaimed suddenly, resuming his familiar half-paternal tone; "it is mere nonsense to go on in this way. I don't want you to do anything as a return for what you call my kindness. If you have your little particular theories of right and wrong, keep them — as long as you can — only don't let them quite stand in the way of common sense, because that is a pity."

"And you don't think this is common sense," said Myra.

"Of course I don't. If I did I should feel with you."

Myra remained silent, and thought. Then she said, "I should not care if I were quite sure that papa and mamma would agree with you."

"Mr. Cameron has not quite lost his intellect yet, I hope," was the reply.

"And you could explain it all to him," said Myra.

"Explain what will want no explanation, when everything comes out, as it must shortly," he replied. "You don't think, Myra, I intend to keep up this farce a moment longer than I can help. But do n't worry yourself. I never thought of having all this fuss when I spoke; I merely felt that Rosamond would like to have one line to tell her where I was, and that I could send it better through you than through anyone else, because I have confidence in you."

"I could not betray you," said Myra.

"Betray!" and he laughed sarcastically; "Rosamond and I are obliged to you; but we have nothing that we fear to have betrayed. We really are arrived at years of discretion, though your superior wisdom may not have discovered it."

"Perhaps it is foolish in me," said Myra, beginning to feel ashamed of her scruples.

"There is no perhaps in the case," he said, carelessly; "but here comes the mule, and I must say one word to Rosamond."

"Stay, just one second. If you could be quite sure that papa and mamma would understand it."

"Dear child, don't trouble yourself any more about it. It is not worth while."

"Except that I could not bear to see Rosamond miserable."

"She will survive it; so shall I."

"But you won't think the same of me as you did before."

"Never mind what I think; but don't keep me now."

"It shall be as you like," said Myra, hesitatingly.

"The question is not what I like, but what I must," replied Mr. Verney, avoiding any direct thanks for the implied consent; "but make your mind easy, my dear child, it will not be for long. Trust me always," he added, taking her hand in his old kind winning way.

Myra was at the moment too relieved at finding herself restored to her place in his regard to feel much compunction at the terms on which the restoration had been effected. She hurried away to help her father in his German conversation, and Rosamond and Mr. Verney were left to say their farewells alone.

Myra's romance of love would have been greatly lessened if she had heard and seen them. Feeling there was indeed on both sides; but vexation mingled with any sorrow which Rosamond might have experienced — and she was almost pettish in her regrets and expostulations, at his determination to leave them; whilst Mr. Verney was alternately soothing and impatient; uttering hurried expressions of affection, and then turning to some observation about the journey, the lateness of the hour, or his own

movements: as if anxious to escape from the obligation of saying what he knew he ought to feel. It was only every now and then when Rosamond showed real regret that he became in the least earnest; and when he did so, he made the most of his impulse — repeating in a colder tone the endearing term which had escaped him in an instant of excitement, and trying to cover the rapid cooling process which began as soon as the word was spoken by some little tenderness of manner. And so they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

THAT parting was the beginning of a succession of provoking little *contretemps*. Mrs. Cameron had caught cold at Aussee, as everyone might naturally have expected she would, and Edmund could not join them as soon as he had promised. Both these circumstances compelled the party to remain at Ischl longer than they had intended, and this necessitated giving up Vienna. The weather cleared a little, and Mr. Cameron and Rosamond made two or three day-excursions; but Myra was generally left behind, because her mother really could not spare her. Mrs. Cameron's eye-sight was so weak, that she found it difficult to amuse herself, and Rosamond had a feeble voice and could not read aloud, and as a matter of course Myra was sacrificed. Not that she felt it a sacrifice, or at least to the extent which many persons might have imagined. The effort of sacrifice lies in the will, and Myra's will was given already. To destroy self was her profession, and every occasion for exercising this profession roused her energy; so much so that she was sometimes surprised at her own equanimity under vexations and disappoint-

ments, which at one time would have fretted her beyond endurance.

But though Myra did not look upon herself as a victim, other persons did. Colonel and Mrs. Hensman came over from St. Wolfgang, and found Myra alone with her mother, and lamented that she was missing the beauties of the neighbourhood; and Mrs. Cameron herself mourned over it in a lugubrious chanting tone, though she took no steps towards a different arrangement, her only hope apparently being that when Edmund arrived things would be different. Mrs. Hensman, a good-natured, sensible woman, who had taken a great fancy to Myra, seized upon this idea, and worked it judiciously: Mr. Cameron was obliged to be in England by a certain time; as soon therefore as Edmund came they were all to move homewards. So, also, Colonel Hensman's destination was England; he would be there probably a few days later than Mr. Cameron, and if Myra could be allowed to remain behind with them at St. Wolfgang, and then — moving more rapidly than would be possible for Mrs. Cameron — meet her father and mother in Paris, it would give her the opportunity of seeing some of the places she had missed. Edmund's society would be a pleasure to Mr. Cameron, and Mrs. Cameron would not miss Myra's reading when they were travelling. It was a well-arranged little plan which, being put into the right groove, ran very smoothly, and Myra was grateful and

happy, and wondered that everyone should be so considerate for her. She had indeed but one regret — for Rosamond, who she thought would miss not having some one to whom she could speak of Mr. Verney.

For beneath all this surface of matter-of-fact-ness the romance of life was still working, and Myra never forgot it, and, indeed was not allowed to do so. How much or how little real feeling Rosamond possessed, was a question which it would have baffled even a keen scrutiniser of the human heart to discover. One thing was clear, that she believed she had a great deal; and by acting upon the belief to a certain extent created the feeling. Being parted from Mr. Verney it was necessary to be melancholy; absent in manner, moody and uncertain in humour, the latter being indeed a necessity of nature rather than of circumstance. As a natural consequence remarks were made, and Mr. and Mrs. Cameron were somewhat uneasy, and a little suspicious, and thought that, perhaps, they had not been quite wise in throwing the young people, as they were called, so much together; all this attracting a good deal of notice towards Rosamond, creating an interest in her which was just what she liked, since there was not the slightest idea on the part of her parents of the extent to which things had gone. As for Myra, she at once accepted her sister's expression of feeling as reality, and treated her accordingly. Rosamond car-

ried on long conversations at night, and gave way to sighs and secret allusions by day, not to Myra's satisfaction, very much indeed to the reverse; but it was all taken in perfect good faith, and Myra was becoming daily more and more convinced that Rosamond's affections were irrevocably engaged, and that it would have been cruel in her to have stood in the way of the one only comfort which could be afforded her in Mr. Verney's absence. As to conscience — when a person has once decided that it is better to yield to the guidance of another in any doubtful case, it is astonishing how soon conscience becomes silent, especially when its voice is obeyed in all other instances. Myra did not allow herself to question Mr. Verney's judgment, when she had resolved upon following it, but went on in happy unconsciousness of error, never disturbed except when she received a short note from Mr. Verney, enclosing a letter for Rosamond, and found herself obliged to resort to a little manœuvring in order to conceal the fact from her parents. Then, indeed, she did feel uncomfortable, but as she was not called upon to say what was untrue, and contrived to avoid deliberately acting it, she escaped any severe self-reproach. This first note was from Golling, and in it Mr. Verney announced his intention of making his way to Innsbruck, where he hoped to find letters. Beyond this his route was, as usual, uncertain. He might go to Meran and the Lago di Garda; he might take

the Ampezzio pass to Venice; or on the other hand, he might give up any notion of Italy, and make his way into Switzerland. Myra tried to find out if Rosamond had received any more definite information as to his future movements, but Rosamond merely smiled sweetly, and said she supposed they were both equally wise, and then she put the letter away in her writing-case with an air which said more plainly than words, "you are not to ask any more questions." Whatever Mr. Verney had written had, however, the effect of making Rosamond very anxious to leave Ischl, and she was almost out of temper when Edmund arrived, and tried to persuade his father that the delay of a couple of days might, with good management and a different route, make no difference as to the time of their reaching England. For almost the first time since they had been abroad, Rosamond talked a great deal about Mrs. Cameron's health, and the danger of fatigue, and Myra in her simplicity was glad to think that as she herself was going to stay behind at St. Wolfgang, Rosamond, at least, would be thoughtful and watchful for her mother. The party broke up at last with the understanding that Colonel and Mrs. Hensman were to bring Myra with them to Paris, and Myra bade her own family good-bye with a heart all the more open to enjoyment because she was not, as on a previous occasion, disturbed by a newly awakened regret for the loss of Mr. Verney's society.

And thus once more Myra found herself in the pleasant *salon* of the old conventual house with its windows opening above the blue lake; and the jagged mountains — varied in colour by every golden gleam which lit up their sharp points, every purple shade which rested upon their deep recesses — set before her, like a wonderful panorama, which she might gaze upon and study, and imprint upon her memory to be a vision of delight for all future years. It was vexatious at first to find that she was not to enjoy her visit alone, but that Mrs. Tracy and Miss Stuart were staying at the *château*. Myra had a latent love of solitude and silence, which though it was overruled by the buoyancy of spirit natural to her age, exhibited itself on all occasions when her feelings were touched. Nothing excited her like the beauty of nature, but the excitement could not be shared. When in travelling her heart beat quickly, and her eyes grew dim with sudden tears as the glorious mountain peaks and the fair valleys of the Bavarian Tyrol spread themselves before her, she instinctively turned aside from the rest of the party, half-surprised, half-ashamed of her own emotions. A light tone or a trivial remark jarred upon her at such moments like a false note in music, and even Mr. Verney's poetical admiration failed to touch the chord which could harmonise with her own feelings. She needed something deeper, more reverent, more nearly approaching to worship. If she

had been alone she would have knelt in thankfulness and awe, for in no other way could she have given vent to the fulness of that deep and pure delight which at times overwhelmed her. And she had looked for such enjoyment at St. Wolfgang. She had pictured to herself a morning spent in the garden, revelling in the gorgeous colours of the flowers and the delicately pencilled foliage of the shrubs, watching the shadows on the hills, and the silvery sparkle on the water, and dreaming — no, not dreaming, but feeling — forgetting care, perplexity, regret, forgetting above all, herself, in the sense of all-pervading and mysterious beauty.

Mrs. Tracy's rather monotonous voice, and Mrs. Hensman's sensible remarks were but ill-suited to such anticipations, and Myra's first feeling of disappointment, when the latter proposed, the morning after her arrival, that they should all take their work and spend a pleasant sociable morning in the pavilion, was very great. She could have found it in her heart to complain that Mrs. Hensman had deceived her, and she said to herself that if she had known there were to be other visitors she would not have accepted the invitation. But Myra was very unfair upon poor Mrs. Hensman. There had been no deception in the case. When she invited Myra, she had not known herself that Mrs. Tracy and Miss Stuart would be her guests likewise. They had been stationary at the little inn, detained day after day by illness. Mrs. Hensman had provided them with

many necessary comforts, and shown them great kindness, but her offer of rooms at the *château* had been always declined till the very day of Myra's arrival, when some impertinent behaviour on the part of the disagreeable landlord had so distressed Mrs. Tracy, that from mere nervousness and alarm she had taken refuge with her new friends, hoping, as she said, to be able to remove to Ischl in a very few days.

Myra would have cared less, she would scarcely, indeed, have cared at all, if Charlotte Stuart had formed one of the sociable pavilion party, but she was not well enough to appear at breakfast, and Myra found herself condemned to a morning of needlework and conversation; the former consisting on her own part of some fancy knitting, which she had not once taken up since she left home, and in which she had not the slightest interest, whilst the latter was merely an interchange of remarks upon the beauty of the view, varied by Mrs. Tracy's account of her voyage from India, and the difficulties she had experienced in travelling through the Tyrol. Myra listened to the latter for some time, in the hope of gaining some information as to the antecedents of her new acquaintances, but Mrs. Tracy, though she talked freely upon other subjects, was singularly reserved on all points which regarded herself or her niece, and Myra at length, heartily tired, ventured to take up a book and steal away to a little distance, where — half hidden by a flowering shrub —

she might occupy herself in some degree, and, at least for a short time, according to her own ideas of enjoyment.

The book was a series of essays. It had been marked for her by Mr. Verney, and Myra turned over the pages, reading different portions as revelations of Mr. Verney's own character. All that was noble, generous, unprejudiced, beautiful in expression, or pure in feeling, had touched him with sympathy and admiration. And there were marks of reference to other books, quotations, similes; the volume seemed to Myra a mine of poetry, wisdom, and valuable information. She felt proud of his friendship for her, it seemed to ennoble whilst it humbled her. She thought of her sister almost with envy. Rosamond would have his companionship always. Would she appreciate it, was a question which Myra did not think of asking. The habit of her own mind was reverence, and Rosamond's outward gifts had always somewhat dazzled her, and now, seen in the light of Mr. Verney's admiration, she became actually idealised, and Myra, indulging the romance which the knowledge of their engagement awakened, laid aside her book, and lost herself in a reverie of the perfection of such a marriage — beauty, refinement, amiability, intellect, poetry, and nobility of heart united — and she herself — it was the one thought of self which entered into the dream — the sharer and chosen confidante of their happiness.

The reverie was interrupted by Miss Stuart. She

came into the garden walking with the slow step of illness, and drawing a shawl round her. Since Myra's former visit her complexion had become more transparent, and the hectic colour on her cheeks was nearly gone, and now the searching, anxious eyes were almost too large — too full for beauty. Whatever characteristics of temper and mind there might have been in the small firm mouth, the short upper lip, the chiselled nose with its rounded nostril, and the square open brow, were all lost in the one expression of hopeless unrest.

And the voice with which she spoke to Myra told the same tale as those lovely piteous eyes.

"Have I disturbed you, Miss Cameron? I ought not to do so. It is so pleasant to be quiet on such a perfect day."

"I like it," said Myra, "but I don't think all persons do. Won't you sit down?" and as she spoke she left her seat, and placed herself on the grass, leaning against the trunk of a tree.

"You should not sit there," said Miss Stuart, still standing. "You will take cold."

"Oh! I never take cold. Please sit down, and I will fetch you a cushion from the house."

"Do n't on any account trouble yourself. The chair will do perfectly well, but indeed you ought to be careful. I said just as you say once."

"Did your illness come on with a cold?" asked Myra.

"Yes — no," and a slight blush overspread Miss Stuart's cheek. "It came on gradually; it is a kind of complication; no one knows what is the matter with me."

"You must try London physicians," said Myra.

"Yes, when I go to England."

"And you are not going now?"

"I don't know. I never do know anything till the time comes."

"It must be very disagreeable to live in uncertainty," said Myra.

"Yes, for some people."

Myra was inclined to say: "Is it so to you?" but the personal question would have seemed impertinent.

"How one ought to enjoy this day!" continued Miss Stuart, as she sat down in Myra's chair, and languidly gazed around her.

"One can't help enjoying it," observed Myra.

The only answer was a sorrowful smile, and Myra added: "At least when one is blessed with good health. I am afraid you are too ill to enjoy anything."

"I am soothed," was the reply; "and that is in a measure enjoyment."

"I suppose it may be, where people have suffered much," replied Myra.

"Yes, there is a good deal of compensation in this world. People learn as they go on in life to be

contented upon very little. But you are so young, you will scarcely understand that theory."

"I am more than sixteen," said Myra.

"I dare say that seems old to you. I know it did once to me."

"It seems not like real age, but like drawing near to it," said Myra.

And Miss Stuart slightly laughed as she inquired: "And what do you call real age?"

"Being old enough to have sorrows and trials," answered Myra.

"You are right; that is age, and there are some who never have known youth, but" —

"There is the servant with the post from Ischl," exclaimed Myra, interrupting, and then apologising. She ran forward to meet him, and returned with two letters. "I am so sorry there are none for you."

Charlotte Stuart's hand, which had been stretched out to take the letters, dropped as if it had been paralysed.

One of Myra's envelopes fell on the ground; as she picked it up she said, "I am surprised this has ever reached me, it is directed so illegibly — just look." She held out the envelope for Miss Stuart to see it.

"Is it the handwriting of a friend of yours?" The question was put in a hard ringing tone, like the striking of metal.

"Yes, a very great friend, a Mr. Verney. He has been with us quite lately. He only left us the

other day." Myra was scarcely thinking of what she said she was so engrossed in her letter; and when Miss Stuart repeated, "The other day? Lately? Do you mean at Ischl?" She replied in the same absent way: "Yes, last week," and went on reading.

"I think I must go in," was uttered in a faint voice, and then Myra woke up to consciousness again. Miss Stuart was standing or rather leaning against the chair. She said to Myra, "Please ask my aunt to come to me," and Myra hastened to the pavilion with a feeling of self-reproach at having been so absorbed, yet not without a sensation of relief when Mrs. Tracy said, "You had better leave my niece to me, my dear Miss Cameron — I will take her into the house." Mrs. Hensman went away also, and Myra was left in the pavilion alone.

And then she read her letters in peace. Mr. Verney's was singularly interesting, giving a short account of his movements, and a long account of what he had felt and thought. In this respect it was the only unreserved communication Myra had ever received from him, yet it contained no reference to his engagement, though a note to Rosamond was enclosed. In the postscript he said, "I should not wonder if we were to meet again before you reach England," but he gave no clue as to his route, and did not say where letters would reach him. It was quite a downfall in feeling to turn from this imaginative and poetical and almost confidential letter to Annette's gossip about school. Myra had nearly forgotten the

existence of Mrs. de Lancey, and the remarks on the French and German teachers, and the peculiarities of the masters were profoundly indifferent to her. Annette could write and think of nothing else. Naturally enough St. John's Wood was her world, and quite as large and important to her as the world of which Mr. Verney was the centre could be to Myra; but romance is not generally sympathising. Myra hurried through the crossed page — feeling extremely provoked that anyone should think of writing across on thin foreign paper, and not understanding that Annette had but two or three sheets in her possession and did not know how to get at more — till she came to a sentence written at the side of the page, and corrected and underlined. Myra could make out the words Mrs. Patty, and Miss Greaves, and something about a message, and India, and it was not till after much careful examination that she could manage to read one sentence. "Mrs. de Lancey says, that the Charlotte Stuart who was Miss Greaves's friend has left India in ill health." Then came something almost entirely illegible, the only words which could be deciphered being — "engaged to Mr. ——" whom, it was impossible to say; though, according to Annette's usual style, there were two notes of admiration after the name.

The "whom" signified but little to Myra just then, but the fact of the engagement was interesting and explanatory of Miss Stuart's reserve. Still there was a little natural curiosity awakened as to the

illegible word. The first letter might be a V, or a T, or a W, and Myra recalled all the names she had heard which might fit what appeared to be the number of letters; all except that of Verney, which did not suggest itself, until, holding the paper at a distance, and catching what might be called the general effect, it flashed across her suddenly. For a moment she felt thunderstruck, but looking at the name again, she read it as Vernon, or, possibly, Varney, or — she could not be sure what it was, only, it could not be Verney. She hurried from the pavilion; why, she did not know. It never occurred to her that she was hurrying from her own thoughts. On her way to the house she met Mrs. Tracy, looking even more anxious than was her wont. Myra's impulse was to join her, and inquire how Miss Stuart was; and the short nervous answer, "Better, thank you," was given; and then they walked slowly side by side without speaking, till Mrs. Tracy said abruptly, "I think you have a friend — Mr. Verney?"

"Yes," answered Myra; and as she spoke, her heart seemed to stop beating.

"Should you mind telling me something about him?" continued Mrs. Tracy.

"No, certainly not. I don't know much; he is a great friend. Would you mind sitting down for a minute?" Myra pointed to a garden seat.

"Oh! no, not at all. I am afraid you are not strong. Are you tired this morning?"

Myra waived the answer, and said, "Mr. Verney

is the nephew of a Colonel Verney who lives near us."

"Yes; I know. A son of the elder brother, and just returned from India."

"He came back some months ago. He talks of going back again, only his health is bad."

"And I think — I imagine he must have been with you abroad."

"Yes."

"And he has left you. Can you tell me where he is to be found?"

"He was at Innsbruck; I don't know where he is now."

"And you cannot tell where a letter would be likely to reach him?"

"No; he does not say."

"Thank you. Excuse my questions. I have a little business with him, that is all."

Mrs. Tracy rose and moved away, and as she left the seat, Colonel Hensman came up to it.

"What! all alone? It is very rude of my wife; I must go and scold her."

"I like being alone," said Myra.

"Oh! poetical, are you? Well, I hope you have been enjoying yourself to your heart's content. There is nothing to disturb you here."

"No," replied Myra; "it is deliciously quiet."

"So that poor love-sick girl says; I have been telling Mrs. Tracy that she should not indulge her. If she were taken to Vienna, or any place where she

could have something to distract her thoughts, there might be some hope for her; there will be none soon if they let her brood over things as she does now."

"Is that what is the matter with her?" asked Myra; and her voice faltered.

Colonel Hensman laughed. "How you young ladies catch at the least rumour of a love story! But you must ask Mrs. Hensman to tell you; she knows more than I do."

"I should not like to ask her," said Myra.

"But you don't mind asking me. Is that because I am more tender-hearted? I shall disappoint you, though. I know nothing about it, except that some good-for-nothing fellow is playing fast and loose with her. I can't tell you the name, and a story is nothing without that."

Colonel Hensman walked off, and Myra took up Mr. Verney's letter again. But with what a changed feeling! This dull pain at her heart — this aching uneasiness — how was she to bear it. What was to be done to relieve it? Did she really suspect, and if so, why did she not at once take some step to find out the truth? She began to read, but something seemed to stop her; the meaning of the words seemed altered, they gave her no pleasure; and she went up to her own room, and brought out from her drawer a little box containing the few other letters which she had received from Mr. Verney. They were all laid before her; but still she did not look at them more closely, and they remained on the

table whilst Myra walked up and down her room, because she could not bear to sit quiet, trying at the same time to think how foolish it was, how like her own hasty judgment, to let an idea gain possession of her which could have no foundation; then taking up a book, and after a few minutes wandering off from it to a repetition of the same arguments — the same reasons why she was not to think what she could not help thinking, to suspect what she could not help suspecting. The summons to luncheon obliged her to appear in the dining-room. Charlotte Stuart was not there; she very seldom did appear at luncheon, so Mrs. Hensman said, and her aunt wished to remain upstairs with her. Colonel Hensman made some allusion to the cause of Miss Stuart's low spirits, which was instantly checked by his wife, and Myra saw from Mrs. Hensman's manner that there was no likelihood of obtaining any information from her. A drive was proposed for the afternoon. Myra did her best to appear pleased, and felt, indeed, that it was the only thing under present circumstances which could be in any way soothing to her; but the slumbering pain awoke again when, as she was leaving the room to dress, Colonel Hensman called out — "If you have any letters for the post you must let me have them now, as I am going to send into Ischl."

Mr. Verney's letter to Rosamond was to be forwarded, and for the first time for many days Myra's conscience was aroused to the question, "Was her

part in the correspondence justifiable?" Too late it was then to ask; too late to draw back. The letter was sent, but the weight upon Myra's spirits grew heavier; and the sensitive, self-reproaching heart, tortured by affection, and bewildered by sophistry, could find no repose but in a forced gaiety, which was a strain upon the powers both of body and mind.

CHAPTER VII.

IN four days' time they were to leave St. Wolfgang. Those four days were to be given up to excursions, and little else was spoken of, but guides, mules, *char-à-bancs*, and provisions. Mrs. Tracy and Miss Stuart lived apart. Myra scarcely saw the former except at luncheon, and Miss Stuart was said to be too unwell to leave her room. She also was to move to Ischl, and from thence to Vienna, when the party broke up. This was all that Myra could learn of her plans. Several other persons were now staying at the *château*, but they were chiefly foreigners. Mrs. Hensman was much engaged with them, and though very kind to Myra, could give her but little personal attention; and so Myra carried her lonely burden about, finding no one with whom to share it, at times forgetting it, then having it brought back by some chance observation; and then again arguing against conviction, and even conscience — carrying on a vain struggle with the truthfulness which was the great and precious gift bestowed upon her by nature, and which up to this period she had so carefully cultivated and cherished.

The last day came, the day before they were to set out for Paris. Myra had that morning ascended the Schaffberg, in order to obtain the earliest and clearest view of the mountains and lakes of the Salzkammergut. She had returned very tired to rest in her chamber the early part of the day; and as she closed her eyes, all the wonderful scenes upon which she had been gazing floated before her, and the enchantment deadened the secret pain, and she fell asleep tranquil and almost happy. She was awakened, after a long rest, by a gentle tap at the door; and when she started up, Charlotte Stuart was standing before her. An open letter was in her hand, her look was haggard, and her breath came quick and faint. Sleep had scarcely left Myra, and but for the glorious sunlight streaming over the lake and flickering upon the walls of her apartment, she might have thought, as she looked upon that wan white figure, that she was still dreaming.

"Don't move;" Miss Stuart drew near the sofa; "only let me speak to you. They will miss me soon and search for me. Listen, while there is time."

"But you are ill," exclaimed Myra, scarce knowing what she said.

"Yes, very ill. Tell me — you know this handwriting?"

Myra looked at the envelope held before her. "Yes, it is Mr. Verney's."

"Your Mr. Verney — your friend — the same

who wrote to you the other day — there is no doubt?”

“None, so far as I can tell.”

“But you must be sure. The Mr. Verney who — who is engaged to your sister Rosamond?”

The hollow laugh which accompanied the question sounded like the tones of insanity; and as Myra delayed to answer, Miss Stuart caught hold of her hand and grasped it tightly, whilst, looking at her fixedly, she said, “Speak, I must know. I will — I do know.”

“If you do know, there is no need to speak,” was Myra’s hesitating and evasive answer.

The grasp laid upon her hand relaxed, and Charlotte Stuart hid her face upon the couch, and a low wail of agony broke from her. Myra made a movement of sympathy, but the unhappy girl turned round almost fiercely. “Don’t pity me, I have no need of pity. He loves me; he does not love her. Pity her — warn her. He loves me — yes; he tells me he loves me. God forgive him my misery!”

Myra could not echo the prayer. A gulf seemed to have opened before her in which all trust in human honour, all confidence in human truth were buried.

“Who told you of his engagement?” she asked in a trembling voice.

Instead of replying, Miss Stuart placed in Myra’s hand another letter in Miss Greaves’s handwriting,

and pointed to the following passage: — “I cannot bring myself to believe a report which I have heard to-day, though it will account for all which has been so inexplicable to me in Mr. Verney’s conduct to yourself. It has been told me upon excellent authority, that after travelling with the Camerons for more than a month, he has engaged himself to Rosamond. I need not say how anxiously I shall look for a contradiction of this rumour from you, and for an assurance that your relations with him remain unaltered.”

“I can contradict it. You know I can,” continued Charlotte, her large lustrous eyes gazing wildly upon Myra. “He writes to me, and loves me. It is the world’s talk. The cruel, cruel world.”

“If he loves you, you cannot be miserable,” said Myra: but a pang of torturing self-reproach shot through her at the falsity of such comfort.

“If — there is no if. It is she who is false, she who has tried to win him from me. But he is mine still, — my all!”

Myra unconsciously repeated the words “my all;” they sounded to her profane.

“Tell her he is my all; she cannot take him from me. Oh! she cannot, she cannot.”

“It is Mr. Verney’s own doing,” replied Myra.

“Then is it true? Oh! say it is not true;” and again the long low wail echoed through the apartment.

"Stay," said Myra, rousing herself from the sense of wretchedness which was so bewildering to her faculties; "what is true or what is not true, I am not at liberty to say. You must inquire of Mr. Verney himself; only remember that my sister is in no way to blame."

"He tells me nothing. I cannot inquire. I do not know where to seek for him. But you know."

"No," replied Myra. "I know no more of his movements than you do, except —"

"But your sister knows. He writes to her?"

"Indeed, indeed you must not question me in this way," said Myra; "but I may see him soon, and if you would trust me with a letter or a message —" she stopped. It was treachery to Rosamond, but pity was too strong for her.

Miss Stuart answered eagerly, "Yes, I trust you. You will help me — yet you are her sister."

"I will try to do what is right," continued Myra; and she added, after a moment's pause, "I shall, I must, see Mr. Verney."

"See him! look," — and Charlotte Stuart held out her transparent hand — "my life is wasting away; my days are numbered. Yet of those precious days would I gladly give up all save one — if that one might be spent with him."

Before Myra could reply, a knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Tracy entered.

In one instant Miss Stuart had recovered her composure. The few words which she spoke in

answer to her aunt's affectionate reprimand for having left her room were uttered quite calmly, and with the same air of reserve and self-command which on ordinary occasions was habitual to her. Without making the least allusion to the subject of their conversation, she went back to her own room almost immediately, Mrs. Tracy accompanying her, and Myra was left to solitude and reflection.

Mrs. Patty Kingsbury was right. There is no trial so overwhelming to the affections and principle of the young, as that which first destroys their confidence in one whom they have accustomed themselves to respect. The shock of that moral earthquake is a shock which is felt for life. Yet, better it may be that it should be experienced early — better that it should come with one great blow from which the elasticity of youth may partially recover, than that distrust should eat into the heart with the slow destructiveness of the canker-worm. The pain, indeed, is greater, but the wound is not so deadly. Myra had been to blame. She had indeed been deceived, but the deception was of her own creation. That, however, was a consciousness yet to come. In the first moments of conviction, her chief thought was still to extenuate Mr. Verney's conduct, to seek for explanations in circumstances of which she knew nothing.

All possible and impossible motives suggested themselves, and were one by one rejected; and Myra's excitement of feeling increased, her brain

worked more restlessly, and a throbbing headache made her every moment less capable of thought, whilst thought appeared to her more and more necessary. For she must act, she must write or speak, she must in some way communicate with Mr. Verney. To be made the instrument of his treachery by being the medium of conveying his letters was no longer possible; and her own weakness in ever having consented to place herself in such a position stood out still more clearly before her. She felt herself condemned in her own sight, condemned also — as she assuredly would be — in the sight of her parents; a party to deceit with her sister, a party to Mr. Verney's treachery, — because she had trusted and believed in him, because she had wilfully put aside her own knowledge of right, and turned from the instinct of her honest conscientiousness, and feared his sneers.

Myra did not hate Mr. Verney. She was too generous — too true and simple-minded, to seek any excuse for herself by a burden laid upon another; but a sense of unutterable helplessness, insecurity — an aching distrust for which there could be no cure, made her heart turn faint, and her limbs tremble, whilst she rested her head on the sofa pillow, unable to find even the merciful relief of tears. She was in this state when Mrs. Tracy once more knocked at the door, and asked for a few moments' conversation. Myra had as yet but little practice in self-command. A nervous, irritable, impetuous tempera-

ment had been her torment from childhood. She could never conceal when she was unhappy, though she could not merely conceal, but subdue her temper. When Mrs. Tracy came up to her kindly and begged her not to disturb herself, and then sat down and asked, with somewhat of a mother's thoughtfulness, whether she was over-tired or ill, the feeling of oppression which seemed to have dried up the fountain of her tears was melted, and her almost uncontrollable impulse was to tell everything, to ask advice, to throw herself once more upon guidance, and so, if it might only be, to have rest — rest for the conscience, rest for the heart.

But she had no opportunity for yielding to the temptation. Mrs. Tracy began immediately in her very quiet rather slow tone: "I would not have disturbed you if I could have avoided it, but I am obliged to speak for Charlotte's sake. You know how we are situated with regard to Mr. Verney. I have seen the report in Miss Greaves's letter, but I cannot find out whether you confirm it; and, indeed, it is very important that I should know."

"If you would not ask me!" exclaimed Myra. "I told Miss Stuart that she should write to Mr. Verney. I cannot answer or say anything."

"In those few words you have said enough," replied Mrs. Tracy, somewhat haughtily. "I can, of course, quite understand. Only, Miss Cameron, for your sister's sake, it is fair that you should

know the character of the man to whom she is willing to give herself."

Myra's face became rigid in the effort to keep down her struggling feelings.

Mrs. Tracy went on. "Two years ago Mr. Verney became attached to my niece. Her father was then in possession of a good fortune, and he was likely to increase it. Mr. Verney knew this, and I do not think I do him any injustice when I say that money is a great consideration with him. He is a man of self-indulgent, extravagant habits. At one time he gambled considerably, though when he first became acquainted with Charlotte, he professed to have given up the practice. He won her affections slowly, by the most unremitting attentions. He flattered and sympathised with her, and they had literary pursuits in common. She disliked his principles at first, but by degrees she became accustomed to them, and —" Mrs. Tracy paused, and drew a long breath — "that is the saddest part — he calls himself a Christian; for any definite faith he possesses he might as well call himself a Mahometan. They have been engaged now for nearly a year. At first the marriage was to have taken place at once, but my brother-in-law's affairs were rather embarrassed at the time, and there was a delay in consequence. It was thought that they would soon come right, and Mr. Verney exerted himself very much to set them right. He lent money, and mixed himself up with business, entirely, as he said, from love to Charlotte, and I

believed him. I believe him now. I have no doubt of his love for her, but ——”

“But what?” exclaimed Myra.

“I believe he wants moral courage, and there is nothing so cruel as cowardice. He knew from the first that his own income would not be sufficient to marry upon, because he had involved himself by his gambling debts and extravagance. He did not dare say what his real condition was, and so he speculated, hoping to retrieve what he had lost.

“Things became worse and worse. He was never open either with Charlotte or her father. It was always delay, excuse, and hope — hope which was never fulfilled. He left India partly because his health had suffered from the climate, partly with the idea of raising some money that was needed for my brother-in-law’s business, which, in fact, had become in a great measure his own. When we parted, I entreated him to break off his engagement, or at least to tell Charlotte exactly how he was circumstanced. I felt, and he felt, that it was excessively unlikely the marriage could ever take place. I saw that uncertainty was rapidly undermining Charlotte’s health, and I was quite sure that she was brave enough to bear the truth; but I could get nothing from him. If for one moment I brought him to the point of courage and sincerity, the next he slid from my grasp, and everything was as vague as before. In my heart I felt convinced that he would have been thankful to be free. He loved Charlotte un-

questionably, but not well enough to make sacrifices for her. He is a man of the world, Miss Cameron, and no man of the world can ever make self second. He suggested that I should tell her everything, and should persuade her to take the first step towards breaking off the engagement. So mean it was in him! so cowardly! He wished to screen himself from any blame which the world might attach to him. When I declined to interfere, he strove to throw the responsibility of the consequences upon me. But I have seen enough of life, Miss Cameron, to know that it is the greatest of mistakes to undertake a duty which does not belong to you. Mr. Verney's affairs and Mr. Verney's marriage were in his own hands. Neither my brother-in-law nor my niece would have endured any interference from me. And indeed so unstable is Mr. Verney, and from his moral cowardice so little to be depended upon, that even if I had consented to open the question with my niece, I could not have reckoned upon his support. He would have allowed me to urge the breaking off of the engagement, and then, when he saw her distress, he would have turned round upon me with reproaches."

Mrs. Tracy paused for an instant, but Myra made no observation. Except a nervous movement of her hands, there were no outward signs of feeling. Mrs. Tracy went on. "Directly after Mr. Verney arrived in England he wrote, begging that Charlotte and myself would follow him. He spoke hopefully

of his prospects, and appeared excessively anxious about Charlotte's health. My brother-in-law insisted upon our going. He is a man of essentially weak character, his whole life has been a failure, and he believes in every new plan which is suggested to him. Moreover, he had been from the first entirely under Mr. Verney's influence. What he expected from our visit to England, except the possible improvement of Charlotte's health, I cannot say. For myself, I had no hope of improvement in that respect from anything except certainty, it mattered not of what kind. It is suspense which has worn, and is still wearing away this poor child's life.

"As to Mr. Verney, I believe his love rose and fell with the condition of his pecuniary affairs. If he could marry Charlotte and live in ease and comfort, he would be glad to do so; and when first he came home I have no doubt he persuaded himself it would be possible, and wrote to us accordingly. But his views were all dreamy. He did not really know what he expected, and before we reached Trieste everything was as unsettled as ever. We were met there by letters telling us that we should do better not to come to England; that it would be more economical to be on the continent; that he would join us."

"But you have not seen him?" exclaimed Myra.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Tracy; "I have seen him for one half hour; the first night of our arrival.

He refused to see Charlotte, he refused to be open with her. He said, as before, that he would write to her. So he left her, I believe to die."

Myra buried her face in her hands. It was at that very time that Mr. Verney had engaged himself to Rosamond!

"Now remember," continued Mrs. Tracy, "that when I tell you all this, I do not in the least accuse Mr. Verney of deliberate treachery. Even if, as I fully believe, he has engaged himself to your sister, and has thus most miserably deceived both her and Charlotte, I believe there has been no preconcerted cruelty to either. Mr. Verney is not an unfeeling man; on the contrary, he is rather tender-hearted; there is nothing he dislikes more than the sight of pain, and it is because of this dislike that he has shrunk from saying to my niece what he knew would distress her. Possibility also is everything with him. That which he can do easily he will do readily. And what I am now going to say I must beg you to believe is from no wish to make inquiries which may seem impertinent. But, as there is no doubt, that the pecuniary difficulties which have stood in the way of his marriage with Charlotte, have cooled rather than stimulated his love, so if a marriage with your sister has in any way been made practicable to him — the very fact of its practicability is likely to have excited what he may fancy an affection for her. He would

fall in love, or imagine himself in love, with the heiress of twenty thousand pounds more readily than with the heiress of five — not from any deliberate calculation, but simply because in the one case he would see his way to the attainment of his end more quickly than in the other."

Myra looked up shocked, and a faint smile passed over Mrs. Tracy's face. "We must not be hard on human nature, my dear. Mr. Verney would not be a bad man because he unconsciously calculated consequences, but he will be a bad man if he is not open with your parents and your sister. I can talk to you without the slightest wish to bring Mr. Verney back to my niece. On the contrary, I have but one earnest desire — to have all connection and communication with him broken off. But it is due to you to say that the same difficulties which have prevented his carrying out his engagement with Charlotte not only exist still, to my certain knowledge, but are very greatly increased. His income, if he should return to India, would be claimed by his creditors, and he would be utterly unable to support a wife and family, for whatever private fortune he may at one time have had is now gone, swallowed up in the wreck of my brother-in-law's affairs. The latter fact is by no means generally known. There have been hopes of retrieving the business till within the last two months, but my

brother-in-law himself now acknowledges that it is hopeless. You may make use of this information as you think best."

"And may I say that I have received it from you?" asked Myra, her voice trembling with agitation.

"Certainly: your friends will, I hope, understand that I can have but one object in making such a communication. If they do not, still I must say what I feel to be right, and bear whatever imputation of a double motive may be laid upon me."

"They could not distrust you, I would explain, — I would assure them," began Myra —

But Mrs. Tracy interrupted her. There was something almost bitter in her tone as she said: "Dear Miss Cameron, do not trouble yourself with any explanation on my account. When you have had my experience you will learn to accept misconception and misrepresentation very quietly. There is a Day coming when we shall all know each other truly. I am quite willing to wait for it. Only forgive me for taking up your time, and, I fear, giving you pain."

Myra had no wish then to open her heart to Mrs. Tracy, and seek counsel and comfort. The stoicism and apparent indifference of her manner were repelling. She had never before seen the effect of long-continued disappointment and experience of deception. Sorrow would have seemed natural, but

calm enduring contempt chilled and perplexed her. Even now she could not realise Mr. Verney's baseness; she only thought of him as having once been noble.

CHAPTER VIII.

BRILLIANT, noisy, and sunshiny, were the splendid streets of Paris. Carriages thronged the Champs Elysées and the Bois de Boulogne, groups of idlers crowded the cafés and the restaurants, men of business rushed along the Boulevards; fashionable worshippers and curious sight-seers ascended the steps of the Madeleine. There was no place so pleasant to Rosamond as Paris; whilst she could *flâner* through the streets in the morning, go to the theatre in the evening, eat an unlimited quantity of ices and bonbons, and spend a moderate sum in lace, ribbons, and little jewelleries, she could even be content for a while to exist without flirting. Under present circumstances Rosamond naturally attributed this possibility to her attachment to Mr. Verney. She was sentimental to herself about it, and found actual pleasure in contrasting her own pretty quiet, modest ways, with the forward independent style of the fast young ladies who presented themselves to the astonished Parisians as the *élite* of English society. For this was one great advantage possessed by Rosamond — when she found

herself so placed that she could not attract admiration from others, she was always able to admire herself. Like the camel in the desert, she kept a supply of civil speeches and pleasant flatteries in her memory wherewith to refresh her thirsty spirit whenever she was inclined to grow weary of a matter-of-fact life. And now she had something still better to fall back upon. She was engaged — and that to a man whom everyone allowed to be superior in taste and talent, and whose least words of approbation, therefore, carried weight. For the present, indeed, the engagement was secret, and so there was an absence of outward excitement; but the concealment was only temporary, and it certainly heightened the romance. And thus Rosamond was very happy in Paris, and quite contented to walk with her brother Edmund, and drive with her mother; and when she was not otherwise engaged, to write to Mr. Verney. She knew what no one else did — all his movements; and it had been one of her little inward triumphs to hear the complaints of his silence and indecision, whilst she knew exactly where he had been and where he meant to be. Rosamond's element was petty mystery, and up to this time she had never found sufficient to satisfy her.

But the correspondence had not been very frequent, on Mr. Verney's side especially. He had written once to Ischl, and the enclosed letter to

herself had been forwarded by Myra. Since then two other letters had been addressed to Myra at Paris. It was evident, therefore, that he did not yet know that she had been left behind at St. Wolfgang. Rosamond concluded that, as it so frequently happens when people are travelling, the particular letter in which she had mentioned this circumstance had not reached him. The arrangement, however, worked just as well as regarded herself. She opened Myra's letter, took out her own, and forwarded the few lines to St. Wolfgang; and then, in her kind pleasant way, expressed her satisfaction at Mrs. Verney's being so fond of Myra. "It was such a good thing for poor little Myra, and had made her quite a different person," and stately Mr. Cameron eulogised Mr. Verney in a speech so well put together that it would have been quite an event if anything so good had been heard in Parliament, and innocent Mrs. Cameron said to herself, and repeated in a letter to Mrs. Verney, that the friendship of a man of Mr. Verney's age and character was quite a boon to her young people. So safe and so superior he was, she only longed for him to return to them!

Only Edmund was silent. He cordially disliked Mr. Verney, and for that reason said little about him. He had no suspicions, however, and nothing in Rosamond's manner awakened them. It was merely the instinct of a truthful nature, repelled by one that was false. Edmund and Myra were alike

in this characteristic; and Myra would long since have judged Mr. Verney as her brother did, but for the unconscious vanity which was flattered by his sympathy, and the womanly reverence and longing for guidance which made her submit to his intellect, whilst wilfully closing her eyes to everything that was deficient in his principles.

"He is a very good fellow, I don't doubt," was Edmund's exclamation at breakfast the fourth morning of their stay in Paris, in reply to one of his mother's now frequent sighing wishes that they could hear something of dear Mr. Verney. "But I am not bound to like him. I believe I inherit my father's prejudice against all Verneys."

"Except the Colonel," said Rosamond. "You and he are immense friends."

"Well, yes. He does give you a blow in your face, and not behind your back; which is more than can be said for his wife."

"Edmund, my dear," interrupted Mrs. Cameron, "I must beg of you not to say anything against Mrs. Verney, it may be so awkward, for I have a note here, telling me that they are in Paris."

"In Paris!" and Edmund uttered a hasty and not very complimentary ejaculation. "What do they come here for?"

"To see the world, I suppose," observed Rosamond. "That is what everyone comes to Paris for."

I think myself that it will be charming having them here. Mrs. Verney is so good-natured and knows everyone."

"I wish you to understand, Rosamond," said Mr. Cameron, looking up from the "Galignani" which, in default of the "Times," was his morning soporific — "I wish you to understand that I can allow no such constant intercourse with Colonel Verney's family in Paris as went on in London. It was too much. Politically opposed as we are, our social intercourse must necessarily be subject to certain restraints. Mrs. Verney's great good sense is indeed a very redeeming item in the aggregate of family qualities, and I do not hesitate to say that I very highly appreciate her; but, unfortunately, her excellence will not in the eye of the world atone for her husband's violence and party-spirit; and I heard remarks made before we left England, which proved to me that it would be unwise to allow any further demonstrations of great intimacy. I have thought fit to say this, and I desire you to remember it."

Mr. Cameron laid down the paper, and stalked out of the room, Mrs. Cameron looking at him with a strained frightened glance of her weak eyes; whilst Edmund strolled to the window, and Rosamond, who had not quite finished her breakfast, remarked how difficult it was in Paris to get an egg properly boiled.

"Your father places me in a very awkward posi-

tion," murmured Mrs. Cameron, after carefully glancing round the room, to be certain that the door was closed; "he shows such attentions to the Verneys whenever we are near each other; indeed, I often say he listens to Mrs. Verney much more than he does to me; and it was entirely his doing having Mr. Verney with us at Munich and Ischl. I should never have thought of asking him to stay; I should not have considered it proper — indeed, it was not; but I could not help it, and he made himself so helpful and agreeable, and is really so very charming."

"I don't see the impropriety," exclaimed Edmund, laughing. "Rosamond and Myra are not likely to fall in love with him, considering his age. It would be no use, indeed, if they did, for he is engaged."

"Engaged! Mr. Verney engaged!" Mrs. Cameron almost screamed her surprise. Rosamond turned pale, spread some butter on a roll, and said: "Engaged, is he? To whom?"

"Some Indian girl; so I hear."

"Oh!" And Rosamond cut her roll into small pieces, but did not manage to eat it.

"But not to tell us!" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron, in a soliloquising tone. "I don't believe it; I can't think — Rosamond, my dear, he certainly did pay you great attentions; and he is fond of Myra, very fond of her — he told me so."

"Platonic affection for young ladies in general," said Edmund. "Just like Verney's humbug."

"But an Indian girl! Not a native, of course; that would be too shocking!"

"A Parsee!" exclaimed Edmund, banteringly; "a regular fire-worshipper; a Miss Something-jee — Something-hoy. A capital hit it will be for Verney. He will get up the Parsee philosophy, and talk down all the learned men at all the learned dinner-parties in London."

"But may we know the lady's real name?" asked Rosamond.

"Certainly, when I know it myself. As it happens, I only heard it in an accidental way, and have quite forgotten it. Are you coming to the Louvre this morning, Rosamond?"

"I think so. What time are we likely to get our letters to-day?"

"I will go and inquire for them, and you can be ready by the time I return. I suppose you will call on Mrs. Verney to-day, in spite of my father's warnings?"

"Oh, no, Rosamond! don't go, my love," exclaimed Mrs. Cameron. "Let Mrs. Verney call upon us; she says, indeed, that she will. I do hope your father will be out."

"Nay," said Edmund, "you had better hope that he may be at home, for he will be certain to

ask her to dinner. What will you bet me, Rosamond, that we don't find Colonel and Mrs. Verney established here, in the same hotel, by the time we come home?"

"I never bet," was Rosamond's reply. "Will you go for the letters?"

"Oh, yes, at once; only I shall be back again before you have settled which bonnet to put on."

Rosamond smiled her reply and walked out of the room, not in the least hurried or excited, leaving Edmund to place Mrs. Cameron's work by her side, and arrange her sofa cushions.

No letters! — a circumstance which Edmund considered worthy of congratulation, as they were able to go off to the Louvre without delay. He was enthusiastic about pictures in his own way, which was not in the least that of a connoisseur. Rosamond, on the contrary, always knew beforehand what she ought to admire, and stood before Murillo's "Assumption of the Virgin," murmuring, just loud enough to be heard, "Exquisite — quite exquisite!" and then, professing to be unable to leave it, begged Edmund to walk through the gallery and return to her, and stationed herself in a graceful attitude of admiration, with her head turned from the door. A gentleman placed himself near to her, but rather behind her. Rosamond would on no account have turned her head directly to look at him, but she moved her position a little, and as she did

so Mr. Verney's voice said, "Rosamond, are you alone?"

Rosamond did not start, though her face flushed. She merely put her glass to her eye, to be quite sure that her brother was not near, and then turning to him, answered, "I am alone just for these few moments. If you have anything to say privately, say it quickly. When did you come?"

"Late last night, or early this morning rather. I told you you might expect me in Paris this week, unless you heard to the contrary. Where is Myra?"

"At St. Wolfgang; or, at least, she was when she last wrote."

Rosamond was not looking at Mr. Verney, or she might have been startled at the change in his countenance. When he paused to reply, she added, "I mentioned that Mrs. Hensman took her back with her after you were gone. What is the matter?" She noticed his expression now.

"Nothing, nothing! She is at St. Wolfgang, you say? Alone, I suppose, with the Hensmans?"

"No; that Mrs. Tracy and Miss Stuart whom she so raved about are there, with several other people; but indeed, I told you of it all in my letter."

"Foreign posts!" he said, carelessly; "but she will be here soon, no doubt."

"I can't tell anything about her precise movements, only the Hensmans are most likely going to bring her here before we leave Paris. You look so distressed I protest I shall begin to be jealous."

"Poor little Myra!" he exclaimed; "yes, I am very fond of her. She is such a good little thing — only too good."

"Just what she is — too good. Her conscience-crotchets are always coming in her way. But I won't find fault with her; I know you are devoted to her. By the by, a most absurd thing happened this morning; Edmund propounded, at breakfast, the fact of your engagement."

"Mine! Ours?"

"Yours — not necessarily mine. I hope the Indian young lady is quite well?" and Rosamond looked at him archly, but trustingly.

His sallow cheek was quite livid as he said, "I don't like jokes upon such subjects."

"You like them better than earnestness, I suppose," replied Rosamond, gaily. "If I had believed it, what would you have said?"

"That you were not what I imagined you to be. Who has sent such a report abroad?"

"I never inquired; I did not dare, or I might have betrayed myself. It only shows how much we are to believe of the world's gossip."

"It must be put a stop to soon." He hesitated. "Rosamond! in six weeks' time I must be on

my way to India. Are you prepared to go with me?"

It was Rosamond's turn to look grave then. She repeated: "Only six weeks?"

"Only six weeks; it may be even less. What will your father say?"

"Ask him."

"And if he should refuse?"

"Ask him again."

Mr. Verney was silent, and Rosamond continued: "I do n't foresee the objection; I do n't see what there is to object to. My father knows I must marry."

"It might be better to have an advocate," said Mr. Verney; "my aunt would take our part."

"But you have insisted upon secrecy; you have urged it."

"Up to this time; but things are changed. Rosamond, I must be married immediately, or not at all."

"Immediately meaning in six weeks' time?" said Rosamond.

"Yes. The world is so absurd about these matters, otherwise one might just manage the matter one's own way, and ask permission when the deed was done."

His tone was light, and Rosamond answered in the same style: "Thank you. To be married privately, as if I was ashamed of what I was doing!

No congratulations, no presents — only grave looks and reproaches. Where is the love that would be worth such a sacrifice?"

"Where, indeed?" he replied, bitterly. "But, Rosamond, if your father should refuse his consent?"

"A very large 'if,' and a very unlikely one, as I have always told you. I would have asked him long ago but for your mysterious reasons for delay, which I never could understand."

"Still, if he should refuse, what would you do?"

"I will answer the question when he has refused; all I say now is, try him."

"When?"

"To-day."

Mr. Verney shook his head.

"Are you a coward?" exclaimed Rosamond, rather indignantly. "Then let me try him."

"My poor darling! so ignorant, so imprudent!" Mr. Verney's caressing, patronising manner for the moment, awed Rosamond with an idea of some unknown danger. He continued in the same tone: "But leave it to me, Rosamond; leave it to me, trust me. And you may trust my aunt; that at least will be a comfort to you."

"If I want comfort," said Rosamond petulantly. "But I see no occasion to trust anyone except ourselves."

"I do; and I must be the judge."

"As you will," was the light reply. "If the end can be gained, I give up the question of means — here is Edmund." And moving away with her quiet graceful step, Rosamond went up to her brother to express her surprise that Mr. Verney should so unexpectedly have returned to Paris.

CHAPTER IX.

"MY dear Charles, and you are really engaged to that sweet girl! Indeed I congratulate you." Mrs. Verney took her nephew's hand in both hers, and looked inexpressible satisfaction.

"I did as you bade me," was the slightly sarcastic reply, and Mr. Verney withdrew his hands, and took care to place them, so that they could not again be seized.

"She is indeed a charming creature, full of grace and animation; and such a temper! absolutely unruffled. The world will only go too smoothly with you both. My theory, I confess, is that the union of two dispositions, equally disposed to glide down the current of life rather than to battle with it, is not desirable for the well-being of either; but in this instance I own I am in fault. Your noble manliness, my dear Charles, will be a support to her feminine weakness; and when storms come, and of course they will come, you will naturally confide in and understand each other. It is indeed a refreshing prospect."

"I wish I could think it so," was the answer.

"Ah! you are morbid. But that has to do with health. I know you always foresee difficulties."

"I do not merely foresee them; they are present," he replied; "I must leave England in six weeks' time, and I must be married, if I am married at all, in a month. Mr. Cameron will never consent, and I believe I was a fool not to think twice before I committed myself."

"Oh! fie, fie! A man in love to talk so! Faint heart never won fair lady. I am ashamed of you."

"If Rosamond had the courage, or the love which she professes to have," observed Mr. Verney, sinking languidly into a chair, "we should avoid all scenes and all difficulties, by not troubling ourselves about consent. When the deed is done, consent is always ready. But she likes the fuss of a public wedding, which I detest."

Mrs. Verney laughed. "What a naughty man you are! The idea of suggesting a private wedding because you hate a public one. No wonder Rosamond is frightened at you. But what is all this terrible difficulty?"

"Merely that Mr. Cameron is a straight-laced prig," said Mr. Verney; "and will have his daughter wooed and won in regular order, for which I have neither time nor patience."

"Very right in Mr. Cameron. Quite consistent

with his sense of propriety and decorum; but I suppose you foresee no real objection?"

"Do you?" Mr. Verney raised himself a little, and listened somewhat eagerly for the answer.

"Well! I will not absolutely undertake to say there will be none. Objections are fashionable. A marriage without them would be *hors de règle*. As Shakespeare says, "the course of true love never did run smooth," and the world is determined it never shall. But I see none which would be insuperable."

"And those which are not insuperable, will be what?"

"My dear Charles, what a singular question! You can answer yourself much better than I can."

"Money," said Mr. Verney.

"Money, alas! the root of all evil."

"And settlements."

"And settlements, as you say. But with Rosamond's prospects, and your Indian income, there can be no ultimate difficulty on that score, though there may be a certain amount of hesitation. I should suppose that your health might be a matter of uneasiness. It might compel you again to leave India."

"And in the meantime Mrs. Fitzgerald will die," said Mr. Verney, "and we shall be able to live comfortably in England."

"Very true! quite unanswerable indeed; except that lawyers are not fond of contingencies. But you would be able to come forward with a settlement of your own, independent of your professional income."

Mr. Verney was silent.

"I understand," continued Mrs. Verney, with a meaning smile; "slightly encumbered! most single men are. They want wives to teach them economy. But Mr. Cameron is not a grasping man. When he sees it is a case of real affection, a real union of hearts, he will not stand out upon the question of a few thousands, knowing, as he must know, what Rosamond has in store."

"I should like to be certain of it," said Mr. Verney.

"Then, my dear Charles, make up your mind to take the only step by which to obtain certainty. Communicate upon the subject at once with Mr. Cameron."

"It will not be possible at once. He is so steeped in prejudice; so anti-Verney politically, that I shall have to fight a pitched battle upon the question of marriage at all, before we even approach the matter of settlements. And it might all be avoided," he added in a lower tone. "It is nothing but a woman's delight in the frippery of a public wedding."

"Hush! hush! I can't have you talk so: you forget what the world would say."

"The world would talk for a day, and then it would forget," was his reply.

"But, my dear Charles, you are merely joking, and the thing is an absurdity, an impossibility. It would be out of the question for me to help you, if you had any idea of the kind. You must see at once I should be compelled to ignore the whole proceeding. So improper, so highly improper it would be!"

"Highly improper, but particularly satisfactory," observed Mr. Verney, in a tone which left it uncertain whether he was in jest or earnest.

"You really alarm me, Charles. I feel quite afraid of mixing myself up with an affair which may have such a doubtful character," exclaimed Mrs. Verney. "I never knew you so disposed to set the world at defiance before. But if you are in such terror of Mr. Cameron's frown, why not leave the matter to me? or at least let me sound him? I am not afraid."

"You are not going to ask to marry his daughter," said Mr. Verney, throwing himself back in his chair, with the comfortable sigh of a tired man, who has suddenly found out a position of rest. "I am not at all sure that you would not state the matter much better than I should myself. You

have but to convince him that he need not turn liberal because his daughter marries a Verney; and as to settlements —" he paused.

"Ten thousand he will think very little," said Mrs. Verney, "but that, if I remember rightly, was all you originally had."

"You must make him contented with less," was the reply.

Mrs. Verney shook her head, and then murmured to herself, "Certainly, there is the professional income, and a retiring pension after due service. He ought to be satisfied."

"Afraid, like myself, I perceive," said Mr. Verney, with a languid and rather amused smile.

The suggestion touched Mrs. Verney's pride in her manœuvring powers. "It would be for the first time in my life then," she exclaimed. "If I might be permitted to give my experience, I should say that what is commonly termed moral cowardice, is more frequently found in your sex than in mine."

"And women rush in where angels fear to tread," he replied. "Forgive the false metre. But I grant you have the courage of ignorance."

"Ignorance or knowledge, it stands us in good stead: and I find as a rule that you gentlemen are extremely glad to avail yourselves of it. But, my dear Charles, in the present instance you do not need to be assured that my best efforts will be exerted in your behalf. To see you and that sweet

girl united, would be a repayment for any anxiety. You believe me?" and again Mr. Verney's hand, which had been incautiously placed in a position of danger, was seized, and a murmured "God bless you!" completed the interview.

CHAPTER X.

SADLY and monotonously day after day wore away in the sick-room of the good old rector of Yare. Sadly, at least, to all but to him, who was the one object of sorrow. It was such a quiet, painless, sinking to rest after the work of life was done, that no one could with reason wish that circumstances should be altered. Dr. Kingsbury had outlived his generation: there were others more active and original, with feelings more in accordance with the spirit of the age, waiting to take his place; and none could venture to say that a change might not be beneficial to the parish. The old Doctor himself felt it, and said it. In moments when he could be roused to conversation, he pointed out his own deficiencies with a clearness which was a new revelation to the single-hearted Mr. Baines, accustomed to regard his rector with a reverence that had scarcely allowed him to face the possibility even of a mistake in his judgment. But there was something about to be taken away which no talent, or zeal, or originality could supply; something which was embodied not in the quaintness of the old rector's dress, or the abstruseness of his sermons, but in the

firmly-grounded quiet consistency of life and teaching, with which no peculiar opinions of his own had ever been permitted to interfere.

Whether our principles of action are to be governed by "we," or by "I," — by collective and traditional, or by individual judgment — is in fact a question which we must all, in one form or another, be called upon to debate at every step in life. At Yare, the "we" was passing away with Dr. Kingsbury, and there were those who, although unconscious of the cause, grieved over the loss with a yearning regret, which seemed almost disproportioned to the termination of an earthly existence already unusually prolonged.

And there was one to whom the old man's death would prove not only the breaking up of hallowed ties, but, so far as human eyes could judge, the entire wreck of happiness. Everyone spoke of, pitied, and felt for Mrs. Patty; yet Mrs. Patty was perhaps the only person, except the Doctor himself, who could allude to the approaching parting with perfect calmness.

After that first pang, kept to herself, or acknowledged only to God, Mrs. Patty never once shrank from the sorrow that lay in her path, never once tried to deceive either herself or others respecting it. It was strange to hear her mention it, strange, at least, to those who had been accustomed to put aside the thought of death — to look upon it as a fearful mystery, only to be hinted at.

"When you are gone, Doctor dear," she would say to her brother, "so and so must be done;" and then the old man would smile, and answer: "Yes, Patty, quite true," and proceed to give his advice as calmly as though he had been speaking of things dependent upon a common journey. It was a great comfort to them both to be able to do so. They had been so dependent upon each other for happiness, that the idea of any separation of interests, even for a time, would have been more bitter far than the bodily parting. They had talked of where Mrs. Patty should live, and fixed upon a cottage in Yare, and calculated the expense, and even gone into details of arrangement, not at all with the idea of taking thought anxiously for the morrow, but merely from the habitual necessity of consulting and knowing each other's plans. And what would have been agony to many, was soothing to the simple mind of Mrs. Patty. For, as she said, "I shall feel I am doing right, Doctor, dear, if I have your sanction; and if it should please God to interfere and prevent it, why then I shall feel right in giving it all up. And anyhow, doing right is all I shall have to think about for the few years, or maybe months, till we meet again."

It seemed to those who looked on, more likely to be the latter than the former, for Mrs. Patty was much worn by her constant watching and nursing, and Faith and Betsey complained bitterly that she would fidget herself about the Doctor's dinner, and

not take a mouthful herself. She was very energetic though, and kept her eye upon the parish, and knew perfectly well what was going on at the schools, and by no means lost her interest in her neighbours; for all these things, besides being more or less duties, were interests to the rector, who listened to her report of them with a pleased smile, even when he could scarcely rouse himself to answer.

"Doctor, dear, the Camerons are coming home, you will be glad to hear," was the information given him one morning, as Mrs. Patty, rather breathless, took possession of the arm-chair opposite to that in which he was sitting propped up by pillows.

Only a smile in reply, and she went on: "Mr. and Mrs. Cameron, and Edmund and Rosamond, are to come first, so our servants say; but little Myra is left behind with some friends."

"Then I shall not see her," murmured the old man.

"Please God you will, Doctor, dear; for Mr. Harrison says you have a good deal of strength yet. The thing which troubles me though is, that it has got about, I can't make out how, that Myra has been ill."

"Poor little girl! that must be sad in a foreign land. She has not my comforts, Patty."

"She won't want them so much, I hope," replied Mrs. Patty, "for young things have a wonderful way of learning to do without what they can't have."

But I should like to hear more. The news came through Miss Greaves, and she heard it from Mrs. De Lancey, but — Isn't it time, Doctor, for you to take your medicine?"

"The globules will be best, Patty," said the Doctor, and a smile which had something almost arch in it lit up his face.

Tears started to Mrs. Patty's eyes.

"Oh, Doctor! and you a sane man and a good!"

"They are least trouble, Patty."

"And they are poison!" exclaimed Mrs. Patty.

"It is all a question of proportion, Patty. But I will not vex you."

"It is Mr. Harrison whom you will vex," replied Mrs. Patty; "and I thought, Doctor, you had given up the globules since poor Miss Medly lost her senses by them, and is never likely to recover them."

"So I had, Patty; so I had. But I talked to Mr. Harrison yesterday, and he quite agreed that his medicine did me no good; and it has a very nauseous flavour. But I will take what you pour out. Did you say Mrs. De Lancey knew about little Myra? I have forgotten who Mrs. De Lancey is."

"The lady who has the school in St. John's Wood, where Juliet and Annette have been sent," replied Mrs. Patty. "Now" — and she handed him the medicine — "just take this. Mrs. De Lancey knows

that Miss Stuart whom Myra wrote about; but you don't recollect. Ah me!"

Dr. Kingsbury leaned his head back in his chair, and his countenance showed that even this short conversation had been trying to him. Mrs. Patty took up her knitting, and they both sat silent for some time, till the Doctor looked up and said: "Mr. Baines will be here presently for prayers."

"At three o'clock," replied Mrs. Patty, "and it wants a quarter to three."

"I pray God to help little Myra, and to comfort her friends if she should be taken from them," continued the Doctor.

"Surely we must all do that," said Mrs. Patty; "and it cheers me to think that little Myra loves her Saviour, and trusts Him, and so it must always be well with her, but I do n't imagine though, from what I heard, that she is so very ill. Mrs. De Lancey must have heard the news from Miss Stuart, because she is staying with Mrs. Hensman, at that odd place where Myra has been. You remember now, do n't you?"

"My memory grows confused, Patty, but I think I recollect something. Was Miss Stuart a very pretty young lady?"

"Very pretty and very unhappy, from all I can hear; and what is more to me, and to you too, Doctor, they declare she is engaged to Mr. Verney. Now, what do you say to that?"

Mrs. Patty gave a triumphant glance at the rector, evidently hoping that she should excite and rouse him by the intelligence, which she had with most resolute self-denial kept as a *bonne-bouche* for the last.

But the old man was too tired to be excited, and he merely answered quietly; "Then you need not fear any more for Rosamond Cameron, Patty."

Mrs. Patty's eyes twinkled a little impatiently. "I should fear for her more than ever if I were her mother, for I should expect her to die of a broken heart. I never in my life heard of anything so double as Mr. Verney. Miss Greaves says that from her experience she has no faith in Indians, but I tell her that is uncharitable; and I know, Doctor, you wouldn't like me to say so."

"Indeed not, Patty, and I am sorry that Miss Greaves should indulge so harsh a judgment. The foundation of prejudice against individuals is constantly to be found in prejudice against classes, and I beg you to tell her so from me. I wish Mr. Verney well, whomsoever he may think fit to marry."

"Ah! Doctor, but in these days engagements do n't seem to lead to marriage, and there is the difficulty of being charitable. Miss Greaves declares, and I can't help fearing she may be right, that Mr. Verney is playing false with them both; and I had it in my mind this morning to write to Mrs. Cameron

and tell her what I had heard, only I did not quite know how to begin."

"Perhaps," said the Doctor, drily, "the young ladies may have been a little in fault, Patty. Young ladies are sometimes wrong, and as we are quite ignorant, it may be as well to divide the blame."

Mrs. Patty shook her head, but she would not contest the point with one who, as a matter of course, always took up the side of the accused; and she merely said: "I wish, at all events, Mr. Verney would make haste and marry some one, and then our minds might be at rest." A remark to which the Doctor roused himself enough to answer, "Which is more perhaps than his would be, Patty. I do n't think, from what I have seen in life, that marriage is a very resting process."

That was the conclusion of the conversation for the time, and it soon passed from Dr. Kingsbury's thoughts, but not so from Mrs. Patty's. She had so accustomed herself for years to look upon the affairs of the Cameron household as her own, that anything which affected, or was likely to affect them was recognised at once as a personal interest, and again she pondered the possibility of addressing a warning letter to Mrs. Cameron; and being stopped as before by the insurmountable difficulty of the first sentence, satisfied herself at last by anticipating a long conversation the very first day of their meeting.

"I must be patient with the poor thing, though,"

said Mrs. Patty, uttering her self-admonitory thoughts aloud; "she is quite ill, and nearly blind, and, I daresay, does not see half that goes on. Well, as poor Miss Medley used to say, men are strange — some men at least."

Mrs. Patty's determination to postpone her letter did not interfere with the indulgence of a little natural curiosity; and at the end of her morning's walk of inspection through the village, she turned up the road to the Hall, in order to make assurance doubly sure by inquiring the exact day when the family were expected, and whether any further tidings had been received of Myra.

The house looked — as most houses cursed even temporarily with absenteeism do look — the picture of desolation. Carpets had been taken up, curtains taken down; whitewashers were in the kitchen, a charwoman in the scullery. Mrs. Patty nearly fell over a dust-pan in the hall, and upset a bucket on her way to the drawing-room; and then, finding no one to give her information, made her way through a freshly-scoured passage to the housekeeper's room. But the only person to be found there was a little kitchen-maid, once a school-girl, busied in laying the cloth for Mrs. Pearson the housekeeper's dinner, the said Mrs. Pearson having gone out, and not being expected to return for half an hour.

"And are you left alone in the house, Fanny?" said Mrs. Patty kindly; "you must have enough to do."

"Please, ma'am, the others are gone away for a holiday, but they are all coming back to-morrow."

"So soon! I suppose, though, you expect your master and mistress back."

"Please, ma'am, they are to be here by the end of the week. Mrs. Pearson had a letter to-day;" and Fanny looked up, proud of the extent of her information.

"And Miss Myra is not coming, I believe," said Mrs. Patty.

"Mrs. Pearson did not tell me, ma'am; she only said things were to be put right in a hurry, which is why we are so busy. Conyers wrote to Mrs. Pearson too." Fanny paused — it was evident she wished to be asked what Conyers had said; and Mrs. Patty very innocently fell into the snare, and inquired if Conyers had mentioned anything more.

"Only about the wedding, please ma'am." Fanny simpered, and looked at Mrs. Patty's astonished face, and simpered again; and unable to resist telling what she knew, added, "Miss Cameron and Mr. Verney, ma'am."

Not one word was obtained in answer from Mrs. Patty. She stood as if turned into stone, her eyes fixed upon the surprised and rather frightened girl — who, instantly conscious that she had betrayed what had been confided to her in secrecy, added, "If you please, ma'am, I was not to say it to anyone;

but Mrs. Pearson could not be angry about you. Only, if you please not to say I told it," and then, taking up some plates which she had just laid on the table, she hurried out of the room, not daring to trust any longer to her own prudence.

Bewilderment had been Mrs. Patty's first sensation, utter incredulity was the second. The very fact of the intelligence reaching her in such a form was conclusive against it. It was but the revival of the old report, and her own private information from Miss Greaves must be more trustworthy. But Mrs. Patty could not be satisfied with these convictions. She sat down to await the return of Mrs. Pearson, not intending to ask any questions which might betray her authority, and so cause mischief, but feeling quite sure that it would not be in the housekeeper's power to conceal the news if it really had been given her as anything more than rumour.

And so, to Mrs. Patty's dire amazement, almost the first words which were spoken by the portly Mrs. Pearson, as she came in tired from her walk and apologised for sitting down in her arm-chair, were, "Of course, Mrs. Patty, you have heard, and I need make no secret — it has not, indeed, been told me officially, but I shall doubtless receive instructions by to-morrow's post — the wedding, Conyers assures me, must come off very soon, for Mr. Verney goes to India immediately. Poor Miss Cameron! what a change for her, but there is no doubt she will be happy, and young ladies like to see the

world; only he does seem rather old, Mrs. Patty, does n't he? And then his health; I can't say I should have thought Mr. Cameron would have approved; but one never can say. We shall be so busy now. I have been down in the village trying to get help, and I can't say I have succeeded yet as I wish. The house is in terrible confusion, Mrs. Patty, as you see, and all to be ready by Friday; and the wedding to come off no one knows how soon!"

Mrs. Pearson giving an opening for an observation by a pause, Mrs. Patty asked: "Has Mrs. Cameron written to you herself, Pearson?"

"No, ma'am, not exactly. That is to say, she sends a few lines, just to tell me what changes she wishes to have made in the boudoir; and to beg that the work-people may be hurried; for, indeed, they are terribly dilatory; but it is Conyers who gives most of the news, as might have been expected. I have no doubt, Mrs. Patty, that my mistress would have written to me herself, if she had not been coming so soon; but as they are to be here on Friday, it was to be expected that she would keep it till she came. There can be no doubt, however, of the fact — no doubt at all," repeated Mrs. Pearson, perceiving Mrs. Patty's look of incredulity. "I will just tell you what Conyers says, if you like to hear." Without waiting for an answer, Mrs. Pearson dived into the depths of her pocket, and brought out the important document. "Let me see; it is just at the

beginning. 'I told you in my last that I should have news for you before long. Mr. Verney and Miss Cameron have made up together at last; and we shall have a gay wedding at the Hall before many weeks are over. It is not yet publicly given out; but I don't doubt that it will be almost directly. The Colonel and Mrs. Verney are here, in the same hotel; and Mrs. Verney has had talks with my master by the hour; so I suppose there have been some difficulties. It is sad to think of poor Miss Myra being ill and away, when such things are going on; but they say she will do very well, if she is kept quite quiet; and, of course, she will be home before the wedding comes off.' Then, at the postscript, there is something still more decided: 'Miss Cameron has begun to talk of buying her things; for it seems that they must sail for India next month.' Was there ever anything so quick? There can be no doubt after that, you see, ma'am," observed Mrs. Pearson, as she folded up the letter triumphantly.

Still Mrs. Patty made no reply, except to inquire if Conyers said anything more about Miss Myra?

"Only just a few words, ma'am. In the first page, I think it is. 'Miss Myra was to have been here to-day; but Mrs. Hensman has written to say that she has a kind of bilious attack, which will prevent her coming; so she is to travel home with them all the way.'"

"Thank you, Pearson," said Mrs. Patty. "We must hope all things will go well, both with Miss Cameron and Miss Myra." And very greatly to the housekeeper's wonder and disappointment, Mrs. Patty wished her good morning, and left her.

CHAPTER XI.

ALONE, ill, weary at heart, troubled in conscience, Myra lay, tossing on her bed, in the least noisy room of the Baierischer Hof at Munich. One form was ever flitting before her nervous, tremulous vision — that of the wan girl who had bent over her at St. Wolfgang, and murmured: "He is my all!" And now Myra kept close to her pillow a little box, which held a lock of dark hair and an enamelled ring; and as she clasped it from time to time, to be certain that it was safe, the same sad voice sounded in her ears the farewell with which Charlotte Stuart had parted from her, when, in the midst of the confusion of a general departure, she had sought for one moment of privacy and confided the treasure to her care. "Give it to him, Miss Cameron, alone. Tell him it contains his choice. He asked me for the hair; — if he should keep it, he will return to me. He gave me the ring; — if he should accept it again, he is gone for ever." Hours had seemed days since Myra received that charge. It was in vain that Mrs. Tracy had equally urged her, in a last interview, to do and say nothing which should in the slightest degree influence Mr.

Verney; in vain she assured Myra, that for her niece's sake everything would be far better left as it was; that a meeting would but bring pain; that under present circumstances, a renewal of the engagement would be most unwise, if not actually wrong. The one idea pressing upon Myra's conscience was the duty of perfect openness upon all points. With her father, with Rosamond — above all, with Mr. Verney — to have no concealment or reservation. Rosamond's happiness, Mr. Verney's most dreaded anger, and the confession which she must herself make of having been in a degree party to the secret, were all put aside. She was, as it were, goaded forward by the bitterness of her disappointment in Mr. Verney, and the sting of her own self-reproach; whilst the tenderness and sympathy of her young heart made her feel intuitively the mockery of her sister's professed affection compared with the passionate love of the unhappy girl, whose misery was leading her to the verge of the grave.

Myra looked her last at St. Wolfgang — the grey mountains and spreading forests, the white walls of the conventual house, and the steep banks of the garden washed by the waters of the silvery lake; the old church, with its picturesque arcade and tall bell-tower; the cottages bordering the shore, and the boats drawn up in front of them, under dark wooden sheds, — all which she had first gazed upon as forming a scene so grand, yet home-like,

that it might make life on earth a paradise — and felt but one wish — to be away from it, and, if possible, forget it. But it was not to be forgotten. Myra was very young, very inexperienced, and most lonely, and the thought now connected with St. Wolfgang haunted her. It followed her in the long weary journey to Salzburg; it pressed upon her still more when she found herself in the same hotel at which she had rested on her journey to Ischl; it urged her to an almost unendurable eagerness and impatience when Mrs. Hensman proposed the delay of two or three days, in order that they might see the things most worthy of note in the neighbourhood; and by the time they had completed the railway journey to Munich, Myra was suffering from something very like a nervous fever. Mrs. Hensman was frightened; the English physician perplexed. It was said to be a bilious attack, because no one knew what other name to give it. But one thing was clear, that excitement and fatigue were equally to be avoided; and Mrs. Hensman, in her almost daily bulletins to Paris, entreated that the letters in answer might contain nothing which should in the least disturb Myra, or aggravate the feverish desire to be at home, which it was so impossible to satisfy. Not that there was any danger — the doctor assured them again and again that there was not the slightest cause for alarm. Rest and quiet were all that would be needed, and in a few days — a week,

probably, at the utmost — they might hope to move again.

Rest and quiet! What prescription is more frequently given, or more easily acquiesced in? Mrs. Hensman, indeed, was quite relieved to think that things were no worse; but Myra turned her head aside, and felt too stony-hearted for tears, and too irritable and wretched for speech.

Griefs and trials are all matters of comparison; we are apt to overlook this as we grow old. When we have faced the great battle of life, and learnt to stand alone in the conflict, looking but to Heaven for aid, we can scarcely recall the trembling, almost agonised hopelessness with which we gazed around, searching for human guidance, when, in the Providence of God, we were first brought into a position of difficulty and left to act according to our own discretion, with our faith in the judgment of others shaken, and our confidence in ourselves — nought. And this was Myra's trial, as it is the trial of hundreds who, like her, have within themselves the power and the will to act rightly and fearlessly, but whose faults have hidden from themselves the strength of their own characters.

God's system of education is very unlike man's. He does with us what we should never venture to do with ourselves. Man must guide, and check, and make definite rules, and map out the lines of duty; God places us where there seems to be no guidance,

no definite law — where rules are intricate, and the path of duty is vague: and when, in our weakness, we would fain find support in the wisdom of an idol of our own uprearing, He dashes it to the ground, and leaves us standing powerless and alone to work out our career for ourselves. So, at least, we say. Whether the complaint be true — whether we are really to be powerless and alone, is the question which must, for the most part, be determined for each of us by the spirit in which we meet that first trial. As the horses and chariots of fire, though hidden from mortal sight, guarded the prophet of old, so the strength and the wisdom of God are guarding the children of His love, though their eyes are blinded and they cannot know it. Alone, yet not alone; perplexed, yet secretly guided; weak; yet strong with a strength which the bravest of worldly hearts might envy; — it needs but one prayer of steadfast faith, one fervent appeal to the boundless wisdom, the unwearying sympathy, which have been theirs long, long before they have learnt to seek them — and discouragement has loosened its chilling hold, and the young heart springs upwards with a vigour of purpose, a noble consciousness of power, which is worth all the aid and all the direction that the wisest of earthly friends could bestow. True, indeed, it is a trial which not all can stand. There are those who must be tended and advised at each step, and for them God most mercifully provides the outward helps which are essential. And there

are others also, who, reckless in their self-confidence, seeing no help from their fellow-creatures, and not caring to seek it from God, rush forward blindly to their destruction; but it is not the less true that the highest natures, those most fitted to exercise responsibility and be the leaders of thought and action, whether in public or in private, are in most instances trained apart by God, through the direct orderings of His Providence, without the intervention of man. Little do they know at the time of the aim and purpose of their lives. Whilst struggling with difficulty, and disheartened by the sense of their own infirmity, little can they feel of the steadfastness of purpose, the clearness of judgment, which they are hourly gaining. It is only when looking back — possibly after many years, possibly at the very close of life, with the blessed assurance of victory won, and the glorious crown already in sight, — that they can venture to recall the difficulties of that season of peril. Then indeed will they look up to God with humble thankfulness, — acknowledging that He who hath done all things well, is in this most worthy of humblest gratitude, that, by leaving them destitute of human support, He compelled them to cast themselves upon Him.

But those thoughts were far off from Myra in her sick-chamber in a foreign land. As she lay restless upon her bed, and so feverish that she was unable to collect her thoughts, it seemed an impossibility to settle what was to be done, or how. At one

moment she determined to write to Mr. Verney; — but the inexperienced girl of sixteen, writing to the man of forty, and such a man, so clever, so sarcastic, so well versed in the ways of the world! — it was a task for which she felt herself quite unfitted! And what could she say to him? How could she express herself? In what way could she appeal to him. Admiration, awe, even something like respect, still kept their hold upon her. The idol was not quite shattered, and in Myra's secret heart there lingered the hope, though scarcely the belief, that some undreamt-of explanation would restore it to its former perfection. No; she could not write to him and accuse him. Or again, she would write to her father, her mother; she would consult Dr. Kingsbury; she would speak to Mrs. Hensman. But it was a question of honour. Mr. Verney had confided his engagement, trusting to her secrecy. Charlotte Stuart had given her confidence in the tone and spirit of one who knew that it would not be betrayed. There was only one thing to be done — she must see Mr. Verney and talk to him. He was always so kind to her, so sympathising; he would understand the pain she suffered, he would forgive her; and he might — yes, she ought to believe and expect it — he might explain his conduct. And then Myra went through the interview in her own mind, feeling herself all the humiliation which she believed Mr. Verney would feel, and then imagining his answer, and being crushed with shame by the discovery that she had

been guilty of a most unjustifiable accusation. Or else, supposing it all true, and picturing to herself his anger and scorn, and Rosamond's distress, and in all probability the necessity of applying to her father, and confessing not only Mr. Verney's misdeeds, but her own share in the concealment. Myra trembled at the prospect, and at last remembered there was a third alternative — to let everything take its course. The engagement with Charlotte Stuart, as Mrs. Tracy acknowledged, was virtually at an end. Why then was she to trouble herself with it? The pecuniary affairs were in no way her concern. What could she know about them? No doubt her father would make due inquiries, and if he was satisfied, what right had she to suggest suspicions of Mr. Verney's integrity? She might write to Charlotte Stuart and say that upon consideration she felt that it would be better not to interfere personally between her and Mr. Verney, and therefore, the ring and the hair should either be sent back, or else forwarded with a note from Miss Stuart herself, as soon as she reached England.

To adopt this alternative was a sore temptation, resisted, returning, resisted again, and even then not overcome, but only adding to Myra's physical and mental disturbance, though still the innate truth and strength of her character compelled her to see that the difficulty lay not in the conflicting claims of duty, but in the necessity of rousing her moral courage. If she had not feared Mr. Verney, she

would have felt no perplexity; whilst, however, she might reason upon the various results of her possible decision, one thing was clear: that the consequences of human actions are uncertain, and therefore can never be a safe rule of right. It took a long time before Myra perceived the force of this axiom, self-evident though it is. It dawned upon her only by degrees; it might have been the answer to her intensely earnest and perfectly sincere prayer, and even then the shrinking timidity of her woman's nature made her long to put it aside. It was too rigid; it made too little allowance for circumstances or human infirmity; and though at sixteen Myra could not reason upon its strictness, yet she felt it. Even when at length, after arguing and counter-arguing, it stood out clear, and she saw that there was no escape from it, and that it must lead her to speak openly to Mr. Verney at whatever cost of pain, she acquiesced in it with a hesitating submission, very unlike the assured satisfaction of mature age, when once it has arrived at a decision, and feels that that decision is right.

Strong in will, impulsive and passionate in feeling, alarmed at the consciousness of her own force of character, Myra could have thrown herself unreservedly upon any guidance which came before her with a claim of authority; and at the moment when she most needed it, she had nothing to aid her but the still small voice which none can hear save the upright in heart.

God help those who stifle it, for it is a voice which when once unheeded, grows fainter and fainter, until at length it fails to be distinguished from the subtleties of human reasoning.

CHAPTER XII.

AND while all this conflict of thought was wearing away Myra's strength at Munich, what was the state of Mr. Cameron's household at Paris?

The news of Myra's illness had been received with very varied feelings. Mr. Cameron, annoyed at not being able precisely to carry out the plans formed, in his own opinion, with consummate wisdom, felt — as he often did feel when things went wrong — that somehow the world might be improved by being governed differently. Mrs. Cameron had from anxiety an attack of nerves, which made her more dependent upon Rosamond than usual, and therefore more inclined to miss and want Myra. Edmund, with a dawning suspicion that Rosamond was not quite open in all her actions, was vexed at not being able to talk out his uneasiness with the sister who, though so much younger than himself, had lately been peculiarly congenial to him. Rosamond, though expressing publicly a due amount of disappointment, was not sure whether she was glad to be freed from Myra's scruples, or sorry to lose her sympathy; and Mr. Verney felt as if an intolerable load had for the time been removed from his shoul-

ders, and was only anxious to make use of the breathing space allowed him before Myra's presence — full as she would be of St. Wolfgang and its guests — should increase the awkwardness and the risk of his position.

So it was that Mrs. Verney, urged on by her own delight in the exercise of her manœuvring powers, and by her nephew's indolent impatience, determined at once to break the ice, and bring before Mr. Cameron's mind the first idea of the marriage. She had never been more careful or exercised more delicate tact. She was not, of course, to propose in Mr. Verney's name, that would have been taking from him his man's privilege and position. She was only to insinuate, to sound, to suggest the idea, and then propound the difficulties herself, instead of allowing Mr. Cameron to do so; and in that way to awaken a spirit of contradiction on the right side. By raising imaginary objections, she was to exercise his skill in knocking them down with the decisive blow which a man always delights to aim at a woman's weak argument. When by this means she had enlisted his temper and his pride on the side of her secret wishes, she was quietly to retire from the field, and leave it open to Mr. Verney to come forward and make the direct attack, which she prophesied must, after such a preparation, be immediately successful.

Poor Mr. Verney! He had never felt more grateful to anyone in his life. His was an unutterably

mean position, and he was not mean by nature. To plan a deception, to carry it on consistently, was not a pleasure to him as it was to Rosamond. He had been a gentleman once, in the world's sense of the epithet, and he could not as yet realise the fact that he was not one still. He might break a heart — that was quite consistent with the most refined feelings — but he could not deliberately go and declare himself possessed of a good professional income, and a tolerable private fortune, when he knew that in strict justice, he had not at that moment a penny which he could call his own. It was a most happy suggestion for him that Mrs. Verney should first introduce these dangerous topics. She would do it in perfect good faith. She might utter unnumbered falsehoods, but they would to her own mind be truth; and Mr. Verney's task would then for the most part be limited to a mere confirmation of her statements. A positive declaration is one thing, an assent is another, at least in the eyes of a moral coward; and as Mr. Verney reposed upon the velvet couch in his aunt's *salon*, and listened to her report of the various conversations which were held, and the progress which the affair was making, he became at length so fascinated by Mrs. Verney's description of his prospects, as she had placed them before Mr. Cameron, that the truth faded gradually more and more from his mind; and before the day of trial arrived he was able to face the awkward demands of his false position with a boldness which,

in a better cause, would have been quite exemplary.

All this was extremely hard upon Mr. Cameron, so very unsuspecting as he was, having his eyes so carefully blinded by the veil of his own supreme self-idolatry! How was such a man to suppose that he could possibly be taken in on the question of his daughter's marriage? Other persons might blunder, might act hastily, might be influenced by unworthy motives, or, what was yet more likely, might be such fools as to be weakly won over to consent to what their better wisdom disapproved. But Mr. Cameron! — why, he had no passions, no prejudices — he was absolutely untouched by the ordinary infirmities of human nature. Let the whole world be wrong, yet he must be right; and when he said "yes," the man would be an idiot who should venture to declare that he ought to have said "no!"

The idea of woman's influence in such a case was an absurdity. Look at the way Mr. Cameron ruled his wife; look at her almost abject submission, her utter prostration of conscience and intellect before the shrine of his supreme authority. Listen to him when he spoke of women generally. Watch with what dignified courtesy he quietly put their opinions aside whenever they differed from him; how blandly sarcastic he was in manner; how politely compassionate to their physical weakness; how patronising to their intellectual powers. One might as well have imagined a man in full

possession of his powers allowing himself to be directed by an infant in long clothes, as Mr. Cameron in any way directed by a woman!

Mr. Cameron had indeed begun his short residence in Paris with a strong determination to keep the two families apart, but when a man is conscious of his own strength of purpose inwardly, he can afford to be a little inconsistent outwardly. A most benevolent desire to give his friends the benefit of his infallible judgment induced him to listen complacently when Mrs. Verney complained of the noise of the hotel they had chosen, and asked his opinion as to the desirableness of taking rooms elsewhere. It would have been quite unkind to throw off a person who evidently trusted so much to his wisdom, especially as the Colonel was worse than ignorant in all matters appertaining to foreign life, and uttered his few words of French with a vehemence of false accent quite excruciating to Mr. Cameron's most correct ear. Mr. Cameron had chosen the best apartments in the best situation for himself, and he could not possibly avoid stating the fact. It would have been unfair to himself not to have done so, for with his reserved, rather stiff style of conversation, which was not at all egotistical in small matters, the world might otherwise have remained ignorant of the perfection of his travelling arrangements.

It was quite natural for Mrs. Verney to exclaim in reply: "The best in Paris! then there can be no hope for us of anything but second-best; but yours

is such a charming situation. Is it absolutely impossible, do you think, to find apartments in the same hotel?"

Doubtless Mr. Cameron might have thrown cold water upon the idea, and would have done so, if this had been all, but when Mrs. Verney added, "To be under the same roof with you would be everything to us. Your advice would be so invaluable;" the assertion was so entirely in accordance with Mr. Cameron's own views, that he really could not help admitting it, and as a necessary result, felt himself bound in conscience to further the plan.

Thus Mrs. Verney established herself *au second*, and when the unhappy Colonel, oppressed by the weight of sixty years, and constantly threatening gout, toiled and panted up the endless stairs, and wondered why on earth she had brought him to such a tower of Babel, she sweetly smiled, and drew his easy chair to the window, and bade him rest and enjoy himself with the charming view, and the columns of the "Times," and then glided away to a few moments' enlivening chat with her "dear Mrs. Cameron," ending, as opportunity offered, with a request for a little advice from her "excellent Mr. Cameron."

The little advice became a lengthened conversation; the lengthened conversation did its work, and at length the die was cast. After a short and somewhat embarrassed interview, in which Mr.

Verney told no actual falsehood himself, and only implied that the statements Mrs. Verney had made were in the main correct, he was allowed to seek Rosamond in order, as it was supposed, to communicate to her for the first time the state of his feelings.

Rosamond, when afterwards summoned to Mr. Cameron, played her part with the most perfect grace and simplicity. She was modestly shy, deeply touched by her father's kindness and generosity of feeling, and finally brought to the confession that he had made her supremely happy; — and so the engagement was acknowledged.

When the fact was announced to Mrs. Verney, she poured forth a torrent of congratulations and approval, quite sufficient to convince Mr. Cameron that he had acted, — as indeed, how could he have done otherwise? the part of a tender, watchful, wise, self-sacrificing parent.

“My dear Mr. Cameron, you have been only too good in this matter. I could not have expected as much in a similar case from the Colonel. He, you know, though most excellent, allows himself at times to be carried away by political feeling, until the claims of private life are unfortunately ignored. But you are so calm, so far-seeing, so raised above all petty rivalries. Your dear child's happiness is to you so superior to every other consideration. And my dear nephew! you have raised him to the very summit of felicity.”

"Mr. Verney confesses himself deeply attached to my daughter, and expresses great satisfaction at the prospect of a union with my family," said Mr. Cameron, raising his head so as to show the full height of his very stiff cravat. "I could have wished, Mrs. Verney, that some things had been different, but I waive the objections. I have considered them, and I waive them."

"Ah! most kind! most unworldly! would that there were more like you! We should not then so often see young people's happiness wrecked by considerations of mere interest."

"My dear madam, understand me. I cannot look upon these questions as you ladies do. An *affaire du cœur* (Mr. Cameron was always pleased to bring in a French expression that he might give his hearers a lesson in pronunciation) is to you, I am well aware, one of primary importance, and, pardon me for saying that it sometimes engrosses your sympathies so as somewhat to warp your judgment. The reverse is the case with me. I wish to consider my daughter's feelings, but I should be wrong to act without reference to her material interests. If I were to do so, I should ultimately sacrifice both."

"Most true," replied Mrs. Verney. "The old proverb, when poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window, is I fear but too true."

"Proverbs, my dear madam, contain the wisdom of ages. That which you have so aptly quoted is a

remarkable example of this statement, and acting upon it, I could not of course listen to your nephew's proposal without fully weighing the position in which my daughter would be placed as his wife. Now, I freely own that this is not in all respects such as I have been in the habit of contemplating for her. Rosamond is singularly endowed; she must command admiration. I might have anticipated for her a brilliant position, — rank, fortune, social, even political influence. But, my dear Mrs. Verney, I have lived to see the instability of human greatness; I have learnt to rise superior to it. When you so candidly pointed out to me the objections to the union, I saw them. I was indeed more alive to them than you could possibly have been yourself; but I reasoned thus. If, I said, I interpose to prevent this marriage, the responsibility of my daughter's happiness will for the future rest upon me. Am I prepared to accept it? This was my question, a very important one as you will no doubt admit; and I answered it in the negative. Then again you suggested the awkwardness which might arise from the different views which the Colonel and myself are apt to take of political subjects. I could not deny your statements. I know that in the generality of cases political differences are likely to become private differences, but I felt — forgive me for saying so — I felt that yours were the fears of your sex, accustomed as they are to be governed by impulse. I have no fears for myself, my dear

madam. I am confident — not, I hope and believe, too confident — of my own self-control; and I may safely engage that however vehemently Colonel Verney may think fit to express his dissent from my opinions, I shall always receive that dissent with calmness, and shall never permit it to interfere with the courtesies which the union of the two families may demand. There remained then only one point for consideration; and here again I give you full credit for the openness with which you expressed your alarm lest the income which Mr. Verney could offer, might not be sufficient to provide my daughter with the luxuries to which she has been accustomed. I granted the correctness and the weight of your calculations, but I felt bound to place in the opposite scale the fact that these luxuries were not absolutely essential. I considered, and I believe I was justified in considering, that if Mr. Verney could offer but a comparatively small income for a few years, yet the experience of those few years might be ultimately beneficial to Rosamond by giving her habits of economy; and I know that, should your nephew's health be spared, as I trust it may, the income of a civil appointment must increase, whilst my daughter (though she is not aware of the fact) is certain to receive a considerable increase of fortune by the death of her aunt. I confided this fact to you in secrecy, but it naturally held a foremost place in my deliberations. The result was, as you know; I sacrificed private feelings,

and what might perhaps be called a justifiable ambition for my child, and have given her to the man of her choice. The world may disapprove; perhaps it will, but I have acted considerately, prudently, conscientiously, and I am satisfied."

"Indeed you have reason to be." Mrs. Verney was so affected by Mr. Cameron's touching summing up of his own merits, that her voice actually faltered, and to spare the betrayal of her weakness, she had recourse to a tender pressure of the hand. And Mr. Cameron himself was for the moment almost unmanned. It was rarely he received such winning sympathy; and when Mrs. Verney softly murmured, "We understand each other; now let us go to your dear wife," he really did feel that to purchase such true appreciation of his virtues, he could admit to terms of brotherly intimacy, not only the passionate Colonel, but even the motley crew of liberals, his political followers, upon whom, when the door of his chamber was closed, and the world was not near to listen, Mr. Cameron was apt to bestow epithets which it would be by no means seemly to repeat.

One great point was gained, but there were two others almost equally important to be attempted. The first to induce Colonel Verney to recognise the proposed alliance graciously, so as not to offend Mr. Cameron's pride, and the second to hasten the marriage before any obstacles could arise to prevent it. The former was Mrs. Verney's task, and she felt now the full benefit of the conversation by which

she had so prudently prepared her husband's mind for what was to come. The outburst of contradiction with which, as a rule, Colonel Verney considered it incumbent upon him to receive all propositions, had already in some degree had its vent. What remained could very well be borne by Mrs. Verney, certain as she was of ultimately bringing him round to her own views. With admirable discretion she carried him off to Versailles the very day of his nephew's proposal, and did not allow him to hear of what had taken place till they were comfortably settled in their hotel, with a quiet day before them. Having him then completely in her own power, she broke the intelligence gradually, agreed with him in seeing all the disagreeables, listened with exemplary patience to his recapitulation of everything Mr. Cameron had ever said or done to annoy him, and at length so soothed him, that by the following morning he was in a condition to take upon himself the part of forgiving and forgetting, which best suited his really generous disposition, and to write a cordial note to Mr. Cameron, accepting the marriage with a very good grace.

Mr. Verney's business, that of hastening the marriage, was more difficult.

The idea of India had not hitherto been a serious objection to the marriage in Mr. Cameron's mind, because he had looked forward to it in the distance. An event which might take place some time in the next year gave leisure for preparation, and Mr.

Cameron could accept most changes with equanimity so long as his dignity was not disturbed by his being hurried. But to be told that Rosamond must be married, and ready to leave England in a month's time, would be an announcement, the effect of which no one could calculate. He had so far accepted the new state of affairs as to acquiesce in the proposal that they should go home at once, but this was merely a concession to feminine weakness.

"Ladies," as, with a patronising smile, he observed to Mrs. Verney, "Ladies are apt to be excited by the prospect of a wedding. They believe that it involves an amount of work which cannot be completed under many weeks. I see no cause for such haste myself. The marriage is as yet only an indefinite idea for the future. We shall have full time for a consideration of the details when the event is fixed. At present I should suggest that little might be said about it. It involves gossip, my dear Mrs. Verney; and gossip, as you will agree with me, is objectionable. Still, as to our return, I give in. In Mrs. Cameron's state of health I should be sorry to disturb her, and she fancies that it is necessary to be at home; therefore I give in."

These very vague notions of time were of most serious moment to Mr. Verney. He had made retreat impossible, and all that remained for him was to carry out his plans boldly and speedily, for always in the background was a vision of Myra returning from St. Wolfgang with remarks, suspicions,

and questions, which he might not be able to parry, and which might risk the loss of all that he had sacrificed honour to obtain. And Mr. Verney's position as regarded Rosamond was by no means happy or satisfactory. Whilst he had been uncertain of obtaining his prize, there had been a little excitement in striving for it. Doubt as to whether she cared for him had roused his vanity, and served as an incentive to the efforts he made to please her; and when first secretly engaged, they were separated, and had no opportunity of trying each other's tastes, or testing the stability of their professed affection. But once acknowledged as Mr. Verney's affianced bride, and Rosamond was fully determined to enjoy all the privileges of her condition. They are privileges which a woman can never enjoy twice, for a second marriage must, of course, be quite matter-of-fact, compared with a first. To be idolised, and made the centre of attraction, though only for a few weeks, must be a most tempting preeminence for many. Rosamond delighted in worship, and worship she was resolved to have. She was the most sweet and gentle-mannered of tyrants, but she allowed her slave no rest. Mr. Verney, intensely indolent, devoted to self-gratification, roused only by the interest of literature or art, was called upon to accompany Rosamond in her walks and drives; to wait for hours whilst she was making her little purchases, to take part in discussions upon dress, to pay visits to tiresome people, to give up every-

thing which had a tendency to occupy his exclusive attention; and if he showed the slightest symptoms of rebellion, to receive a shower of complaints, quiet, but sharp as the quills of a porcupine, which perhaps only feminine irritation could invent; and which were all the more unendurable because, though aimed at random, they were sure to strike upon that one point — the sincerity of professed affection — in which Mr. Verney was defenceless.

He was to be pitied. He might have been open to contempt if the world had known the truth; but he was much more to be pitied. He had never deliberately intended to sin against truth and honour; he had drifted away from them — that was all. The currents of life had been too strong for him, and his very talents had hidden the fact from him. So keen and vivid in his perceptions when he chose to exert them; so quick in seizing the negative on all subjects — in seeing what ought *not* to have been said or done; so cleverly cynical; so courteous even when he withered with his censure, it had never once struck him that the least, the very least, practical effort after goodness, even let it be never so great a failure, is better and nobler than the most clear-sighted view of human imperfections, or the most eloquent criticism upon human plans. His words had been a veil to his deeds throughout his whole life; but words have no power over feelings, and still, in the secrecy of his heart, Mr. Verney's thoughts reverted to the

sorrow-stricken girl, brought face to face with the destiny of misery which he had himself prepared for her, and which, in his better moments, he would even now have averted from her, at any sacrifice short of the courage required to draw back instead of to go on. For Mr. Verney was no monster of wickedness and cruelty. There was much good about him — not *in* him, but *about* him — hovering near, overshadowing his faults, but not making its home in his heart. Yet he did not do the less evil; and now, because he felt that to stand still was a greater danger than to advance, his very cowardice made him bold; and four days after the engagement was first recognised, he suddenly announced to Mr. Cameron that, from private information, he was led to expect a recall to India almost immediately, and that, under these circumstances, he was compelled to press the question of an immediate marriage. If a delay could afterwards be obtained, Rosamond would be able to remain with her own family until the last moment, but the marriage itself was a necessity. Mr. Verney blundered in using that word “necessity.” Mr. Cameron was far too elevated above the rest of mankind to recognise any necessity but his own will, and the inadvertence caused Mr. Verney a two hours’ argument, ending very nearly in a complete rupture. It was only through the aid of Mrs. Verney’s flatteries that he again carried the day, and left Mr. Cameron satisfied with the conviction, so dear to his self-appre-

ciation, that he was, as usual, acting the part of a paternal martyr.

They started for England, and Rosamond was to be married in three weeks.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A LETTER for you, Myra," said Mrs. Hensman, coming into Myra's room at Munich before the latter was dressed, and laying before her a very English-looking document, directed in a large legible hand. Mrs. Hensman had no fear of the exciting contents of that letter; it certainly did not come from home; the handwriting belonged neither to Mrs. Cameron nor Rosamond, and they had been Myra's only correspondents for the last fortnight. Besides, if it were not so, Myra was better and stronger, and they were talking of leaving Munich, and it would be impossible then to keep from her the intelligence which had been conveyed to Mrs. Hensman a few days previous, that Rosamond was engaged to Mr. Verney. And really it did not seem there could be any reason for making a mystery of it. Rosamond and Mrs. Cameron had indeed both written anxiously, entreating that Myra might not be informed of it until she was quite strong, as it was likely to excite her too much; but Mrs. Hensman did not understand the excitement of young ladies about anything except their own marriage, or some subject connected with it, and she

gave the newly-arrived letter to Myra, in the full belief that, whatever might be its contents, it would do her good rather than harm. And certainly, to judge from Myra's exclamation and smile of delight, Mrs. Hensman had judged wisely.

"From Mrs. Patty! How very good of her! Please, dear Mrs. Hensman, open the blinds; I am so much obliged to you for bringing it."

Myra was much altered, even from that short illness. Her features had a thin sharp look, and her eyes were almost painfully bright. And she was very nervous too; her hand trembled so much that she could not open the letter herself. If Mrs. Hensman had been a more diligent observer of human nature, she might have remarked these symptoms, and wondered at their cause; but she had one explanation for all phases of illness — fatigue and biliousness, long journeys and foreign cookery! And Myra had rested for a fortnight, and been fed on chicken and rice, and of course, therefore, she was recovering rapidly, and all that remained to make her uncomfortable would soon pass off. This confidence in Myra's improvement was a little shaken, however, as Mrs. Hensman lingered in the room whilst the letter was being read. Myra's face showed such unmistakable eagerness, surprise, and distress, as to create a very uneasy misgiving as to the wisdom exercised in giving it her.

"No bad news, my dear, I hope?" she ventured to say; and Myra looked up, and answered, hurriedly,

“Oh, no! none, thank you,” and went on reading, and of course Mrs. Hensman left her.

This was Mrs. Patty's letter: —

“My dear Myra, — The Doctor and I have heard that you are not well, and we are troubled at the news, though I am not thinking that you are very ill for one or two reasons — first, because I know your mamma is coming home to-morrow, and next because Mrs. Pearson told me to-day about Rosamond's being about to be married so soon to Mr. Verney. Neither of these things would be thought of if your friends were anxious about you; but the Doctor and I still think it must be very uncomfortable to be ill in a foreign land, where, as I have always heard, there is more show than comfort, and we wish you to know that we think about you. As to Rosamond's marriage, I wish her more happiness than falls to the lot of most people; and I hope she has chosen well, and will make a good nurse to her husband when he grows old, which he is likely to do many years before she does. You are so fond of Mr. Verney, my dear Myra, that I dare say you are very glad to have him for a brother-in-law. I wish he may prove a good as well as a pleasant connection, but if he will stay in India it will not so much signify. The Doctor sends you his best love, and would very much like to see you. When he heard you were ill, and kept behind at Munich, he began to think that he should not live to do so, for he grows very weak, and does

less and less each day. But, as I tell him, God most times takes off the earthly garments of us old people slowly, in order, no doubt, not to hurry or frighten us. And I don't see myself all the bad symptoms which he sees. Mr. Harrison comes to him every day, and so does Mr. Baines, and he is able to talk to them both. Mr. Baines told him yesterday that Johnny Ford is quite a different boy since he has been at the Asylum, which was very pleasant hearing for the Doctor, and will be the same for you also, as you were so interested in him. I always remember the day you and I went to see Johnny — the day that Mr. Verney came to luncheon. How little I thought then how much he would have to do with your family! Mr. Baines has asked for a little holiday, and is likely to be away at the wedding, if, as I hear, it is to come off soon. He is not looking very well; I wish he did not want to go just now, but health must be attended to. Dear Myra, I shall be very pleased to see you again. The Doctor says you will be a comfort to me by and by, and he pleases himself with thinking that I shall be nearer to you in my little cottage than I am now. He made the landlord come and see him last week, and settled how they were to manage for me to have two little parlours and a bedroom for a friend. Poor dear! it comforts him to look after everything for me, but my thoughts turn more to a resting-place in paradise than to any rest on earth. And I shall soon follow the Doctor. He and I often talk of it, and he says

he does not doubt that he shall be allowed to come and meet me. It would be very home-like and pleasant if it were so; but anyhow I could never feel lonely or strange with my Blessed Saviour to take care of me, and so I tell the Doctor, and he and I are quite happy, and quite willing that things should be as they are; and so must you be, dear Myra. We shall all shed sorrowful tears, no doubt, when the time comes to say good-bye; but I have learnt to feel that tears are of many kinds, and that there are some which God's love so sweetens that one should be loth to exchange them for smiles.

"And now I must say good-bye, for Faith is going to the post, and to do some errands in the village, and if I write any more I shall make her late in returning. I send my best love, and the Doctor bids me add his blessing. We shall both look anxiously for news of your being better. — Your very affectionate old friend,

"MARTHA KINGSBURY."

Myra read through the letter to the end. What impression she received from the latter part it would be difficult to say. There are times when the utter dissimilarity between those who are living for this world, and those who are living for the next, presents itself to us so vividly that they appear scarcely to belong to the same race of created beings. That simple trusting mind which could accept parting and grief, Death and Eternity so quietly, what connection

could it have with the false, selfish, sceptical heart which seemed destined to work misery for all who were brought in contact with it? Myra read Mrs. Patty's words of confidence in God, as if they were the words of the Bible, but it was impossible to feel that they could be an every-day reality. The one reality to her at that moment was cold-hearted deception and its consequences. Rosamond to be married to Mr. Verney immediately! — Then it was all known, acknowledged, settled, and she had not been told of it. For an instant every other feeling was swallowed up in the bitterness of wounded pride, and the thought crossed her mind, that as she had been wilfully kept in ignorance, events must take their course, and she could not be responsible for them. But again, why had she not been told? What motive could there be for withholding the intelligence? Myra was too generous to indulge an angry feeling groundlessly, and she seized upon the doubt at once. Mrs. Patty did not say how, or from whom she had received the information; and surely, if the news were true, Mrs. Hensman would have heard it, but she evidently knew nothing. It would be better to wait quietly, not to say, or do anything, at least for a few days, when there would doubtless be a confirmation, or a refutation of the report. And Myra strove to be patient, and exerted herself to dress, and then went into the *salon*, and tried to read, and talk, and be natural; and failed

so entirely to conceal her nervous uneasiness, that Mrs. Hensman secretly decided that she had made a mistake in giving her the letter, as it had so evidently done her harm, and that it would be a dangerous experiment to repeat. The one thing to be done was to keep her quiet, and get her to England as soon as possible. When once in the care of her own family they might treat her as they thought best. And with this idea Mrs. Hensman wrote by that day's post, quite agreeing that nothing should be said about the engagement at present, and suggesting that frequent letters were upon the whole rather to be avoided than encouraged; Myra was so nervously excited with the least thing, and then the feverishness returned and the weakness consequent upon it. Mrs. Hensman hoped to be in England with her in the course of a fortnight, and there everything might be broken to her prudently.

The days wore on lingeringly, anxiously, doubtfully, and Myra improved so little, if at all, that Mrs. Hensman at length moved in despair. They travelled slowly to Stuttgardt, Heidelberg, Frankfort, Coblenz, Cologne, Liège, Lille, resting often for a day, but always with such uncertainty in their movements that there was no opportunity of receiving letters, and still Myra did not even know decidedly where Mr. Verney was, still less had she time or power to write to him. But she was going home; in a few days she would be in England. It was only to be patient; to pray to be shown what to do;

to ask for courage that she might not fail in her duty; that she might say the right thing in the right way. How often she went over in her mind the dreaded interview need not be told, nor how she pictured to herself Mr. Verney's withering smile and quiet sneer, and thought how he would hate, perhaps despise her—and marry Rosamond after all. Myra never believed that she should prevent the marriage. Her confidence in Mr. Verney's power was far too strong for that. He would carry his point and put her aside, and she would be his sister, but not as he once might have been. He would never forgive her — never love her again; and even now Myra's heart was so earnest, so true in its affection, that the thought drew bitter tears from her eyes.

The Hotel Dessin, at Calais, was not reached till late at night. The wind howled through the uncarpeted passages and the rain beat against the imperfectly-fastened windows, and a distant roar of the angry sea was heard as the under-tone to every burst of the tempestuous wind! But it was for one night only, — anything may be borne for one night; and there are very many worse shelters from a storm than the Hotel Dessin. When Myra was told, however, the next morning that it was too rough for her to be allowed to cross the Channel, her heart absolutely failed her, and she burst into tears.

"Weakness of spirits, consequent on loss of strength," said Mrs. Hensman; and perhaps she was right. At any rate she was more confirmed in her

resolution not to run any risk; and the faint hope which Myra had entertained of being able to gain her point, and be permitted to cross at all hazards, was extinguished. She sat down in the comfortless *salon*, not even attempting to read, but trying to amuse herself by watching the sturdy peasants, who, regardless of the rain, to which French people generally seem to be supremely indifferent, were trudging through the streets with their *sabots* clattering on the rough *pavé*. But a white cap and a wooden shoe were no longer novel sights, and Myra's eye was much more quickly caught by the black coat and white neck-tie of an English gentleman, a clergyman evidently, rather young, not very dignified in his appearance or walk, but surely, Myra thought she knew him — doubted, looked, doubted again; then, as he finally stopped before the entrance to the hotel, exclaimed, "Mr. Baines!" and absolutely forgetful of propriety, almost ran out of the room to meet him.

Mrs. Hensman was very glad to see an English face, though it might be that of a person nearly a stranger. Colonel Hensman laughed, and declared that his little friend Myra was so excited, he could not but fear the meeting would be dangerous, but still, in a foreign country, civility was a first duty; and he forthwith went downstairs to renew his acquaintance with Mr. Baines, and invite him to join them in their private *salon*.

Mr. Baines, struggling with the difficulties of a

French sentence, and a first experience of *francs*, *sous*, and *centimes*, received the invitation with a thankfulness which was quite touching; and confiding his purse to the Colonel, who promised to make all due payments, and engage his bedroom for him, was ushered upstairs by the waiter, and when the door of the *salon* was opened, found himself alone with Myra. His first exclamation was one of pleasure; his next of most perplexed surprise.

"Are you not intending to cross? Surely, you are going?"

"Mrs. Hensman won't go," said Myra; "she is afraid of the storm."

"But not going? You will be too late! Is it impossible?"

"Not at all impossible; but I am not allowed."

"But you must go — surely, you must. You will not be in time."

"Not in time for to-day, but in time for to-morrow."

"But a day will make so much difference — I don't understand."

"Neither do I," said Myra.

"You intend to be present, of course?"

"Present at what? Please to speak out, Mr. Baines. You look so strange. What is the matter?"

"But — surely, it can't have been kept from you. The day after to-morrow is —"

"What?"

"Your sister's wedding day."

Myra turned very pale, sat perfectly still for about two seconds, and then rose and walked slowly out of the room. Almost immediately afterwards Mrs. Hensman entered. Mr. Baines stood up to explain, and attempted to apologise for having been abrupt, but Mrs. Hensman interrupted him: "Excuse me; we will leave all that. Is this news true?"

"Quite true."

"The day after to-morrow?"

"Undoubtedly. I understood that Miss Myra Cameron was expected at home yesterday."

Mrs. Hensman thought for a moment. "Is the packet gone?" she rang the bell. It was not answered for several minutes; Mr. Baines proposed to go in search of Colonel Hensman; Mrs. Hensman followed him, but the landlord of the hotel was met on the stairs, and the question was repeated.

"He did not know whether the packet was gone; he would inquire; he thought it possible — probable; he would return directly." But ten minutes, which seemed an hour, went by, and still he did not come. At length the answer was brought — the packet was at that very moment leaving the harbour. Mrs. Hensman gave a sigh of relief, and led the way back to the *salon*.

"Now, Mr. Baines," she said, as she sat down on the velvet but cushionless sofa, and begged him to

take the arm-chair opposite, "we have time before us; you must tell me all about it. It is a most inexplicable and unfortunate blunder. I knew, certainly, that Rosamond Cameron was engaged, but this marriage is a thunderbolt."

It was placing the unhappy young curate on the rack, but he bore the ordeal with great outward composure. "Mr. Cameron's family," he said, "had been in England, as doubtless Mrs. Hensman knew, for more than a fortnight. Miss Cameron's engagement had been announced directly they arrived, and he always understood that the marriage would be speedy, but he had heard nothing definite till ten days ago, when he was told that no time could be lost, as Mr. Verney was under the necessity of starting immediately for India, and that the wedding-day was fixed. At the same time, he understood that Miss Myra Cameron was on her way home, and would probably arrive there three or four days before the wedding. Beyond this he knew nothing. As to why he had chosen that precise time for leaving Yare, and escaping the wedding festivities, Mr. Baines said nothing. He confined himself to a bare narration of facts, given in a dry tone, and with considerable rapidity of utterance.

Mrs. Hensman listened politely, but it was evident that she scarcely heard what he said; and when he ended, instead of making any direct reply, she merely remarked, "I see how it is; they must have written

to Munich after we left it. We went off earlier than we had intended, in order to have a day at Heidelberg. How very provoking!"

"But you were prepared; you knew of the engagement," said Mr. Baines.

"Oh, yes, in a way; that is, Colonel Hensman and myself did. But it has been kept from Myra — she has been so unwell, and she is so easily excited. We wanted her to be at home, and be told of it by her own family quietly."

"And I mentioned it so suddenly!" exclaimed poor Mr. Baines, looking alarmed at the thought of the possible mischief he had done.

Mrs. Hensman gave him no consolation; she did feel very unreasonably provoked with him, and she said, coldly, "It is too late to regret, and Myra must have been told before to-morrow. She will be at home now in time."

"But it is so startling — it will all seem so hurried; and she will lose a day with her sister," said Mr. Baines, in the tone of one who thought the latter vexation too serious to be endured with anything like equanimity.

"Myra is too sensible to fret unnecessarily," was the reply; but Mrs. Hensman did not apparently feel as certain of this fact as her words implied, for, without any apology, she went immediately to look for Myra, and poor Mr. Baines was left to meditate upon his blunder and his disappointment, and con-

sole himself as best he might with Murray and a foreign Bradshaw, or, when they failed, to amuse himself with the novelties of the *sabots* and *blouses*, the torrents of rain, and the *pavé* streets, which had so entirely failed to interest Myra.

CHAPTER XIV.

"No news of Myra?" said Mrs. Cameron, watching her husband anxiously as he opened the post-bag at breakfast time.

"I do not see what news you are to expect, my dear; Myra will be here almost as soon as a letter could reach us. Rosamond, these documents are for you; a secretary will be required to answer them."

Mr. Cameron handed Rosamond a collection of letters, some congratulatory, some from tradespeople and milliners. They were glanced at, and laid aside with an air of quiet importance, and Rosamond continued her breakfast.

"I shall be very glad when this turmoil is over," observed Mrs. Cameron, plaintively; "and I don't understand about Myra. I thought she would certainly have written a few lines to her sister. And it is such a storm to-day! They cannot possibly cross, and Myra will not be able to try on her dress. Are you sure, Rosamond, that Conyers gave the right pattern? And then she has been ill, and perhaps she is thinner; it would be so very awkward if the dress did not fit. Don't you

think it impossible for them to cross to-day, Mr. Cameron?"

"I think nothing impossible, my dear, that is necessary. Myra must come; I told Mrs. Hensman so. If they had done wisely, they would have taken the Ostend passage and have been here yesterday. It is very unwise to hasten things in this way."

Mr. Cameron looked a dignified rebuke at Rosamond as he said this, for in his secret heart he was not quite easy as to Myra's silence; and whenever he was uncomfortable he solaced himself by blaming some one for some thing. Just now, everything disagreeable was laid to the charge of the hurry and business occasioned by the wedding.

"I can't help thinking it was foolish in us to keep her so much in ignorance," continued Mrs. Cameron; "she will be so very much startled, and she takes things to heart curiously sometimes. But then we did not know anything ourselves for certain till quite lately. It is a thousand pities Mr. Verney could not have waited a little longer."

"Myra will do very well, mamma," said Rosamond, in a tone of quiet assurance, which was like an opiate to Mrs. Cameron's nervous fidgetiness. "She will have sufficient time to think and reconcile herself to everything on the journey, and she will have been spared a great deal of confusion and worry by not having been here the last fortnight."

"Certainly, that is very true. I have never suffered so much in all my life from the whirl of things as I have since we came home. I have not been able to settle myself in the least, and Conyers seems to have no time to attend to anything. And now, to-day, how many people are coming?"

"I have made a list, my dear," said Mr. Cameron. "I will read it to you."

He drew a paper from his pocket-book, and went through the names of aunts, uncles, cousins, intimate friends, persons who were certain to come, persons who were doubtful, persons who had been asked and refused, persons who would like to come but could not, till poor Mrs. Cameron felt as if she had been looking at a merry-go-round, and the various individuals mentioned flitted past her bewildered brain, and became absolutely undistinguishable.

"I desire to do everything with method," said Mr. Cameron. "There is nothing like method for the avoidance of confusion, more especially when time presses. You will understand now, my dear, all that you have to do, and I will leave a copy of this paper with you for your instruction. Juliet," and he turned to the two younger children, who had been brought from school to be present at their sister's wedding — "you write a good and legible hand, let this list be copied for your mamma, and then return it to me."

"And who did you say were coming to sleep?"

inquired Mrs. Cameron; "I did not quite understand."

"The paper, my dear! You will have nothing to do but to consult the paper. Rosamond, I shall require your attendance in my study this evening. The necessary legal documents will by that time be prepared."

"And if Myra should not come?" inquired Mrs. Cameron.

"Myra will come, my dear. She must come, and she will. I beg that you will not distress yourself."

Mr. Cameron begged in the tone of command, and his wife was silenced; but when he had left the breakfast table she again confided her misgivings to Rosamond.

"There was a storm, that was certain; and packets did not always cross in stormy weather, and what should they do if Myra did not come?" — observations which had all been made and answered before, and Rosamond's only resource was to divert Mrs. Cameron's mind for the present by talking of the crowd of visitors, whilst earnestly hoping in her own mind that Mrs. Verney would, as usual, drive over from Stormont early, and use her all-powerful influence for the quieting of Mrs. Cameron's nerves.

Rosamond really was to be admired that morning for the tact, patience, and self-possession which she displayed. Myra, under similar circumstances, would not have done half as well. Rosamond might have

been the most unselfish of mortals, to judge by the care and thought which she bestowed upon all things and all people. Mrs. Cameron complained of hasty arrangements, and had more than once been heard to prophesy that nothing could by any possibility be properly managed when so little time was allowed for preparations; but Rosamond had from the first determined that whether much haste or little were to be used, she would not bate one iota of the essentials of a wedding ordered in the best style; and quietly and diligently she had worked, not only for the last fortnight, but even before they left Paris, with the view of being ready at the appointed time.

"Miss Cameron is so far-seeing about everything," said Conyers to Mrs. Pearson, when the wedding was discussed that same day in the housekeeper's room. "Would you believe it, she had ordered half her dresses before anyone else would have thought about them, and now she takes everything as quietly as if she had been getting ready to be married for the last six months. Mr. Verney would not find many ladies with such thought. Just imagine what poor Miss Myra would have done in the same case! Why, she would not have had a thing ready, even at the last moment. Well! there are some people born with brains for common use, and some with brains for uncommon; and for my part, I begin to think the common ones get through the world much the best."

"Very true, Conyers," was the reply, "but, do you know, I can't help taking a greater fancy to Miss Myra of the two. I shouldn't like to be her lady's-maid, and no doubt you speak feelingly; but Miss Cameron is never caught in the wrong in anything, and somehow that strikes me as being what my Scotch grandmother used to call 'uncanny.'"

Uncanny or not, Rosamond was most surprisingly useful on that day. Not even to Mr. Verney, on whom she had latterly vented any secret feelings of annoyance, did she show the slightest shade of impatience, fretfulness, or discontent. She was evidently basking in the sunshine of her position, supremely pleased with herself, and only one degree less pleased with every other person. As for Mr. Verney, he was the root and author of it all, and of necessity received his due share of appreciation. Rosamond was sweetly deferential to him now, at least whenever any one was present. It belonged to the part of a *fiancée*, and she would on no account have been otherwise. If she had no eyes to see that he was cold and irritable almost to nervousness, that his face looked haggard, that he started at sounds which were perfectly natural, examined the weather-glass as though some important event depended upon it, and was so abstracted that he often answered her questions in a way which was scarcely sensible — who was to blame her? She had gained her object. She enjoyed the *éclat* of her engagement, and looked

forward to the dignity of a wife. Mr. Verney was clever and exclusive, and she was proud of his admiration. She liked him, and, indeed, believed she loved him. He was too indolent to contradict her, and with him she thought that she should be more her own mistress than she could be in her father's house. In short, marriage had presented itself as rather an agreeable and exciting possibility, and as there seemed no particular reason against it, it appeared better to accept it. Rosamond had taken care of herself, and Mr. Verney had, no doubt, taken equal care of himself. It was only unfortunate that he did not show his contentment to the world, or at least to that portion of it which was prepared to criticise. Mr. Cameron, indeed, was absent as usual; Mrs. Cameron was closeted with Mrs. Verney, or engrossed in busy nothings; and the guests who arrived by instalments were at first too much occupied with themselves, their journeys, and their requirements for comfort, to scan his words or actions very closely. But the servants made their remarks freely, and by them it was decided that Mr. Verney looked much more as though he was preparing for his execution than for his wedding; "a thing not to be wondered at," as Conyers observed, "seeing that the gentleman was nothing on such occasions, and every one wished him out of the way. It was only when the wedding was over that he would have things according to his own fashion. If they would just wait a little they

would see quite a change, for she knew from what she had heard at Stormont, that Mr. Verney was not a gentleman to be put upon by any one."

The early part of that day was occupied by Rosamond in giving orders for Mrs. Cameron; the afternoon was devoted to farewell visits in the village, in order to leave the next day absolutely free for packing and final arrangements, so that there might be no confusion on the wedding morning. Mr. Verney offered to go with her, but Rosamond negatived the proposal. They might meet possibly at the Rectory, she said, but parish visits she preferred paying alone; they would be managed more quickly.

The visit to the Rectory was Rosamond's last duty. She delayed it till she had only ten minutes to spare, if she hoped to be at home in time to dress for dinner. Mrs. Patty had engaged that the Doctor would see her at any hour. Weak though he was, he would make every effort to say good-bye to her; a more solemn good-bye far than any which Rosamond contemplated; but she either could not or would not face the fact, and tripped as lightly up the stairs to the sick-room, as though she was about to enter a ball-room.

Yet even Rosamond was sobered when she approached her old friend. There is a vast difference between the aspect of illness however serious, and of death — a difference which none can understand who have not witnessed it. We may watch by a

sick-bed, week after week, month after month, and feel no hesitation in bringing to it the pursuits and amusements of common life. We smile, and the smile is without sadness; we laugh, and the mirth gives us no shock. We even wish, as we say, to distract the invalid's thoughts; we know that business and pleasure imply the existence of a hope of recovery, and we feel that by encouraging such a hope, we do in fact strengthen life. But there is a look, indescribable, but instantaneously felt, which acts upon us like the solemnity of a religious rite. As we gaze upon it, business becomes profanation, and mirth a mockery. Death has laid its grasp upon that mortal frame, and death, however gentle its approach, is the summons to a Presence before which every interest, thought, and enjoyment of earth must be tested for Eternity.

Rosamond Cameron was the selfish, frivolous devotee of this world, when she crossed the threshold of Dr. Kingsbury's chamber; but when she sat down beside the old man's bed, and caught the earnest expression of his glassy, deep-sunk eye, and the flickering of his heavily-drawn breath, she was the awed frightened worshipper of a power which for the moment touched her conscience to the quick, and withdrew the veil from the self-deception of her life. She was very silent, very still, and the old man held her hand, and looked at her steadily. "You are kind in coming," he said, with a tenderness of tone which Rosamond had rarely heard.

"I wished to say good-bye," said Rosamond, "and to-morrow I might not have time."

"A long good-bye; not a good-bye for ever. God grant it, my child."

"Thank you, sir," and a tear dimmed Rosamond's eyes; "but I hope — I think I may see you again before I sail."

"As God wills. I have done little for you, my dear. I ought to have done much. May God forgive me."

"Oh! sir, indeed, indeed," — and Rosamond looked perplexed and troubled — "I ought to be much better than I am."

"I have done little for you," he repeated; "but I pray for you. Will Mr. Verney come and see me? I should like to see him."

"He will be here almost directly, I expect," replied Rosamond, feeling relieved at the introduction of an ordinary topic. "But are you sure, sir, it will not tire you to see him?"

"Not at all, if he will forgive my talking much. My breath grows very short; I cannot enjoy his conversation as I did. I trust we may meet where there will be no such drawbacks."

"Doctor, dear, don't tire yourself," said Mrs. Patty, looking in at a doorway which opened into a dressing-room.

"I will take care, Patty, thank you. Will you bring me the book?"

Mrs. Patty entered with a heavy tread, to which however the old man seemed quite insensible; she placed a Bible upon the bed, and went away.

"I dare say you have several, my dear," he said to Rosamond, as he pointed to it, "but I give you what I value most. When you look at it —" he paused for breath, and at that moment a shadow darkened the doorway, and Mrs. Patty again came up to the bedside and said:

"Mr. Verney, Doctor; only for one instant. I have told him he must not stay longer."

The old Rector's eyes lighted up with a gleam of their former interest, and when Mr. Verney approached, without waiting for any greeting, he took his hand, and joined it with Rosamond's, and murmured as he held them both; "Grant that they may so live together in this world, that in the world to come they may have life everlasting."

There was no response, but Mr. Verney's face was ashy in its paleness. Rosamond sat down trembling.

"Shall I move the book, Doctor?" said Mrs. Patty.

But he laid his hand upon it. "I was saying — I wished to say — Mr. Verney, death is the truest of all tests."

"It is not death with you yet, Doctor, I hope," began Mr. Verney.

"Yes, sir, it is death; not perhaps to-day, or to-morrow, but death inevitable, and very soon. My

dear," and he turned to Rosamond, "the Bible is for you both. Mr. Verney, a dying man's words are for you both. Christianity is truth; Christ is everything. Live for Him; for there is nothing else worth living for."

A sigh rose from the depths of Mr. Verney's breast, and he said in a tone low and earnest, and in which there yet blended somewhat of his natural sarcasm, "I wish you could give me the legacy of your faith, Doctor; I should be a better man than I have ever been yet."

"Sir, it will not come by wishes; it will come by prayer. But we should have spoken of these things before."

"Yes, indeed we should; that is, if it would have done any good; but I am afraid it is too late now."

"Too late, too late for so many things. Lord, I pray Thee to pardon me;" and the old man clasped his hands together, whilst an expression intense in its sorrowful humility rested upon his sharpened features.

Mrs. Patty came forward. "That is enough, Doctor, dear. Now Mr. Verney, if you please."

Dr. Kingsbury looked at Mr. Verney intently, and murmured a solemn farewell; and then, as Rosamond drew nearer, he took her hand and pressed it to his lips with a half paternal, half courtly tenderness, and said, as he released it: "My child, I would give you my last blessing."

She knelt, and laying his hand upon her head, the old Doctor committed her to "God's gracious mercy and protection, and prayed that the Lord would lift up His countenance upon her, and give her peace, both at that time and evermore;" and then Rosamond rose up and left the room with Mr. Verney, feeling for the time a better Christian in spirit than she had ever been before in the course of her whole life.

CHAPTER XV.

So gay they were that evening! Mr. Verney seemed quite to have rallied from any depression of spirits, and was really the life of the party. They were mostly relations who had arrived, and everyone felt at liberty to be at home, and Rosamond enjoyed showing her presents, which gave topics for conversation; but better than anything, a telegraphic message had been received from Calais, stating that it was impossible to cross because of the gale, but that Myra might certainly be expected the next day. Mrs. Cameron therefore was no longer uneasy, and having again been assured by Conyers that Miss Myra's dress was certain to fit her, felt herself no longer burdened by responsibility, especially as Rosamond herself promised to take especial care of Myra's "toilette," so that she might not, according to her mother's fears, make herself remarkable by being quite a figure on the wedding morning. Mrs. Verney was more than ever amiable and agreeable under the burden of the preparations for the coming event. She quite undertook the duties of hostess at the Hall, when Mrs. Cameron was too tired to exert herself, and went through a series of pleasant flat-

teries to the elderly relations, whilst Rosamond played, and sang, and talked with the younger ones; Mr. Verney hovering near her, watching her as though she had been a pretty and petted child, and every now and then leading her out to some quick repartee, which, uttered in Rosamond's sweet voice and with her very quiet manner, never failed to be perfectly lady-like. In that respect Mr. Verney had certainly chosen well. His wife would never offend his taste. And Rosamond was more to be loved that evening. She was more real, more genuine in her good-nature, more earnest and simple in all she said. The better part of her nature had been touched by the old Doctor's farewell, and its influence still lingered with her. But it was only lingering; there was no depth in the feeling; it awoke no self-scrutiny, no penitence; it was accompanied by no resolutions. The blossom was fair to the eye, but the plant had no root, and in a few hours it would fade. By the next morning it had faded.

How, indeed, could it be otherwise? No leisure was there for thought or regret, for hope or fear, on that crowded, busy, most matter-of-fact day. We idealise important occasions. We look forward to them as we imagine they ought to be; as in fact they are in spirit; but we forget that the material forms in which they are presented to us will at the moment, in all probability, entirely prevent our realising this spirit. If we have not learnt to perceive the unseen and invisible under the veil of our

ordinary life, we shall be unable to discover it when it is presented to us under circumstances which are extraordinary. They who live with falsehoods — fashion, vanity, worldly ambition, self-importance — as if they involved lasting interests, will be blind when brought in contact with the most impressive realities, because, in the ordering of God's Providence, the same forms invest both truth and deception, the things of Time and the things of Eternity; and only the eyes which have been opened by His grace can see the immeasurable difference between them.

Rosamond Cameron's last day of preparation for her wedding was, as such days always must be, distracted by orders, interruptions, trials of temper, little disappointments, cares of the most minute character. And as Rosamond had never trained herself to see in all such daily occurrences anything by which to elevate her mind by the exercise of self-discipline, or lead her above the world by the very turmoil and annoyance which beset her in it; so now they entirely overpowered the higher yearnings which the thought of death had awakened. The seed had been sown in the heart, but the cares and the pleasures of life were already springing up and choking it.

Mr. Verney was not like Rosamond; he was too indolent, too indifferent to be engrossed by petty business. He gave his orders to his servants, and then left them to be executed. It was not in his

way to trouble himself, except to find fault when anything was forgotten or done amiss. And it might be that he did see deeper into the meaning of all that was going on; that he did in one sense realise more of its importance. Boxes and packages, dresses and presents, were nothing to him, and he gave them no attention; but the prospect of relief from pecuniary care, and the attainment of luxury and worldly position, were a great deal; and all these were involved in his approaching marriage; and, therefore, whilst smiling patronisingly upon Rosamond, he kept himself as much as possible aloof from the business which gathered round her; as though marriage was too serious to admit of such lighter considerations; and looked, moved, and spoke with dignity and calmness, and in his secret heart was — miserable.

“Myra must be here soon,” said Mrs. Cameron, entering the school-room where Edmund, Juliet, and Annette were engaged, under Rosamond’s superintendence, in packing a box of books and drawings, which were especially to be cared for. “It is getting on for five o’clock, and your father said certainly she would be at home in time for dinner.”

“Godfrey says she can’t come till after eight,” said Juliet, “and he must know.”

“I don’t see, my dear, why Godfrey is to know better than your father. I shall go and ask Mr. Verney. I know he is in the library, and really I am anxious.”

"Let me go," said Edmund, "though I don't suppose he can tell us more than Bradshaw."

"Godfrey understands Bradshaw best," persisted Juliet, "and he and I looked at it last night, and settled it."

"Then of course it will be so," said Rosamond, laughing.

"Of course," repeated Edmund. "It is such a pity that Godfrey and Juliet can't undertake the government of the world; they would manage it admirably."

"With Mr. Verney to help us," said Juliet. "I am sure he lays down the law more than any one."

"Only he does it in a discreet way," observed Rosamond.

"Yes," said Juliet, meaningly, "he is very discreet. We all know that; don't we, Annette?"

"Juliet, the sooner you go back to school the better," remarked Edmund, sharply.

"I meant no harm," replied Juliet, in a tone of mock humility. "I only repeated what Miss Greaves said."

"Edmund, if you would just go and look for Mr. Verney, and bring him here," said Mrs. Cameron. "And Juliet, you must learn not to be pert. What does it signify what Miss Greaves said?"

"Nothing now, mamma, certainly," replied Juliet. "And Miss Greaves has never really known

Mr. Verney; though she has heard things said of him."

Rosamond looked up quickly, but she did not ask what Miss Greaves had heard. Juliet, however, answered the glance.

"She heard of him, you know, from that young Indian lady, Miss Stuart, whom people said he was going to marry."

"Oh!" was Rosamond's short reply.

"And you can't think how surprised she was, when Mrs. de Lancey told her of your engagement, Rosamond. She would not believe it at first, and I was so glad when I could prove it was true. Though I heard Miss Greaves say to Mrs. de Lancey, that Miss Stuart had been jilted."

"Juliet, this gossip is wrong and unladylike," observed Mrs. Cameron, severely; "don't let me hear any more of it."

But Rosamond only smiled, and said gently, "Oh yes, mamma, if you please; it is amusing to know the nonsense the world talks. Let me hear it all, Juliet."

"Yes, let us hear it all;" and Juliet felt a hand laid lightly on her shoulder, and, turning round, saw Mr. Verney standing behind her. "Young ladies' stories of their schools are a revelation of a new world."

Juliet coloured crimson, shook off Mr. Verney's hand, and remained silent.

There was a most awkward pause. "Mysteries!" said Mr. Verney. "I won't inquire, but you might trust me."

"No mystery," observed Mrs. Cameron; "but Juliet brings home school-room gossip, and I don't approve of it."

"It was not gossip, it was truth," murmured Juliet to Annette; but Annette was prudent, and took no notice.

Rosamond busied herself with the packing, but that she was uncomfortable was very evident. Mrs. Cameron had recourse to Bradshaw, and engaged both Mr. Verney and Edmund's attention in the endeavour to explain it, which, as her sight was so bad that she could not read the figures, was no easy task. Mr. Verney glanced at Rosamond more than once, and when at length Mrs. Cameron released him, he went up to her, and said: "You are tiring yourself; you had better let me help you."

"Thank you, no; I can manage for myself," and Rosamond turned decidedly away from him.

"Isn't it so curious how days come over again?" exclaimed Juliet. "Don't you remember, Mr. Verney, the day we were packing for Rosamond before she went up to London, how you came in just when she was looking over a portfolio as she is doing now, and how you admired the 'Bridge of St. Martin?'"

"Yes," he said, "I have reason to remember it;" and drawing nearer to Rosamond, he added, in a

tone intended for no one but herself, "It was the gift of that drawing which first gave me confidence."

Juliet's quick ears had, however, caught the words, and with her usual utter want of tact, she exclaimed: "It was only half Rosamond's after all. It did duty for Annette too, when it was wanted, so it was very convenient. It gained Annette a prize, and —"

Edmund interrupted her. "Juliet, it strikes me that both you and Annette chatter much more than you work. You may just as well put on your bonnets and come for a walk with me. Perhaps, though, my mother wants you?"

"No." Mrs. Cameron did not want them; "she was going to lie down in her own room; she was very tired, and her eyes ached; she wished Myra was at home to read to her, and then perhaps she might go to sleep." Annette offered to take Myra's place, but Mrs. Cameron was fanciful about reading. She was accustomed to Myra, and could not reconcile herself to anyone else; and Edmund, who seemed bent upon taking possession of his two younger sisters, and leaving Mr. Verney and Rosamond alone, repeated his proposal for a walk, and succeeded in dispersing the party.

Whether his thoughtfulness was appreciated, remained to be proved. Rosamond continued her occupation, Mr. Verney stood by her; neither spoke

for some seconds. Then Mr. Verney said, "And you won't let me help you?"

"No, thank you."

"There is something the matter, Rosamond."

"Nothing, thank you."

"That means something; I must know."

"And if I do not choose to say?"

"You are annoyed at some nonsense of Juliet's?"

"I have not heard any nonsense that I am aware of."

"Some sense then; something she has told you."

"She has said nothing to annoy me."

Mr. Verney bit his lip. "Rosamond, I can't stand this."

"Neither can I. Would you kindly move out of the light?"

He made a gesture of impatience, and was going away. Then he stopped, and said: "Are we to go on in this way all day?"

"In what way? I shall soon have finished what I am doing."

"You mean to drive me wild!" he exclaimed. "How can I explain what is amiss, if you won't tell me what it is?"

"There is nothing amiss. I daresay your young Indian friend has recovered her disappointment by this time, and of course she is the only person to be pitied."

Mr. Verney turned very pale.

"I see," continued Rosamond, bitterly, "there is no need of explanation. It is all very natural. I do n't find fault, only I think I might have been told."

"Told! what? That intolerable school gossip!"

"Yes, it is quite intolerable."

"But what is it? For pity's sake, Rosamond, do n't go on with this absurd mystery."

"I merely follow your example," said Rosamond. "If you had plainly told me, when I alluded to a similar report in Paris, that you had been engaged before, I should have understood it. I am not jealous."

"But I was not engaged; I was — it is all nonsense. What do you mean?"

"Only that I should have felt it was treating me more honourably to be quite open, as I have been with you. I have never been engaged till now. I should have told you if I had been."

"Engaged? folly! absurdity! Do you suppose, Rosamond, that a man of my age is bound to confess every passing fancy?"

"Certainly not. A passing fancy and an engagement are very different."

"And if I had been engaged, where would have been the harm?"

"None at all. Though I do n't know that it is pleasant to go about the world, as the person who has caused another to be jilted."

"I don't allow that word, Rosamond."

"I don't wish you to allow it. Tell me only that I may contradict it."

"I will not answer the question; it is an insult. Rosamond, you can't doubt me."

"I don't want to do so," said Rosamond, more gently, "but I cannot have a child like Juliet sneering at me. And — I should like to know the truth."

"Would you?" and he smiled a little sarcastically; "it would be very easily told. You had better apply to the circulating library, and read how often foolish men have been caught by pretty faces, and then repented. Seriously, it is not worth your inquiring about; only I can't bear to see you unlike yourself. Was the young lady's name Stuart?"

He hesitated as he spoke the name, but Rosamond did not remark it, and before she could answer, he went on quietly, "An Indian fancy! one must have something to amuse oneself with in such a wearisome life. And all men take to flirting more or less. I don't pretend to say that I was better than the rest, and I daresay the young lady — as most young ladies do — considered it a more serious occupation than I did. But it is not worth your troubling yourself about, love. Won't you believe me?"

Rosamond was touched by the tone. Her pride rather than her affection had been wounded, and to

see Mr. Verney in the least humble, quite satisfied her.

She looked up and smiled, as she answered: "I only wish you would take Juliet in hand. She is much worse than she used to be, and she was intolerable enough before. I wonder how it is that nothing can ever make her a lady."

Mr. Verney shrugged his shoulders. "Nature!" he said. "It is always too strong for art. But leave her to me; she shall not torment you any more."

"She has no reserve, no discretion," continued Rosamond. "And she piques herself upon it; she calls it truth."

"Truth which is not always to be spoken," said Mr. Verney.

"No; in this respect she is somewhat like Myra, who is also at times uncommonly awkward and disagreeable, in what she says. Don't you think so?"

Mr. Verney made no answer.

"I forgot — Myra is such a pet of yours," continued Rosamond, interpreting his silence; "you won't be satisfied till you have seen her."

"Perhaps not," and Mr. Verney very quickly left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

How he did despise himself! There is no feeling so utterly unendurable as that. And Mr. Verney was not a man to take out his actions, examine, and make excuses for them. He was too proud to own that he was wrong, too indolent to endeavour to prove that he was right. His effort for years had been to escape from himself, and he was an adept in the art. When, as a youth, he did what conscience condemned, he simply strove to forget it, and so he did now. And under the circumstances in which he was placed, he could have forgotten, he could have made himself fairly comfortable, if only he had not been haunted by an apparently unreasonable dread of Myra's return. How she could interfere with him, indeed, he did not see; and whatever she might say, he had but to adopt the same tone which had just succeeded so well with Rosamond, for there is nothing like acknowledging a report up to a certain point if one wishes to stop it. But, after all, Mr. Verney had not lost the feelings of a gentleman, however little he might retain those of a Christian; and when he was compelled to evade, equivocate, perhaps even to utter a direct

falsehood, he despised himself, and then he was wretched. He wandered into the garden now, and finding Godfrey Cameron there, endured the penance of his society for nearly an hour, because he could not bear to be left alone. He strolled into Mrs. Cameron's boudoir, and again went through all the Bradshaw calculations, in order to occupy his thoughts; he almost determined to walk down to the Parsonage and inquire after the rector, but he was afraid of being asked to walk up-stairs, and he could not face another interview with a dying man, and that man Dr. Kingsbury; and at length, as the dinner hour approached, he hurried back to Stormont, dreading, as he said to Rosamond, to be scrutinised before the appointed time by a fresh relay of guests; and, by the aid of a cigar, a novel, and his toilet, contrived to distract his mind until the carriage was announced which was to take him to dine at the Hall.

And then came the ordeal of the stiff circle before dinner, and the introductions and the attempts at conversation; but all that was an assistance to Mr. Verney. He was in his element when called upon to exert himself conversationally, and the sight of numbers awoke his spirit of criticism, and so his self-appreciation was restored. Whenever he could be satirical he felt himself superior, and then the ordinary laws which govern, or ought to govern the common herd, became a matter of less importance to him; he could afford to overlook them. By the

time dinner was on the table, ladies glanced at him timidly and admiringly, and gentlemen listened to him as a man whose opinions were worth having, and Mr. Verney was satisfied, and at ease.

"Was not that a ring at the bell?" asked Mrs. Cameron of the butler, just as the second course was placed on the table. Mr. Verney, who was seated near her, turned round as though he had been shot. The butler left the room to inquire.

"We are expecting Myra," said Mrs. Cameron in explanation to the gentleman at her right hand. "Mr. Verney is as anxious about her as any of us; she is such a favourite of his."

Captain Stevens, who was a distant relation, laughed, and made some common-place remark about its not being permitted to fall in love with two young ladies at once.

"I am afraid it is an offence rather frequently committed," exclaimed Colonel Verney, joining in the conversation. "I have heard of three cases of jilting this season."

"If the first culprit could have been hung, it would have been a warning to the rest," said Edmund Cameron, from the opposite side of the table. "One dreadful example every season would save an infinity of trouble."

"I hope you would not make an example of both sexes," observed Mrs. Verney, "for jilting, you know, is considered by some young ladies quite their privilege."

There was a general exclamation of disavowal of the doctrine from all the ladies present, and Godfrey, thrusting himself into the conversation, and taking their part for the sake of contradiction, undertook to prove from his own knowledge that in one or two instances, generally known, the fault had rested with the gentleman. Rosamond's taste went against the topic, and she tried to stop him; but whenever Godfrey was in the vein for anecdotes, it would have been as easy to do this as to arrest the current of a river. Story followed story, whilst, one by one, the attention of nearly every person at table was attracted, and Godfrey had, what of all things he most coveted — the command of the conversation.

"It was not Myra," said Mrs. Cameron, leaning forward and addressing Mr. Verney in an undertone. He bowed and smiled, and said he did not expect her so soon; and then he went on quietly discussing a question of political reform with General Mainwaring, his next neighbour, apparently not hearing a syllable which Godfrey was saying, and only pausing to fill his glass whenever the wine came round. He drank but little generally, but that evening was an exception.

"I understand your nephew has first-rate powers of conversation," remarked Captain Stevens to Mrs. Verney. "It is a pity he does not give more people the benefit of them."

"He has no morbid desire for social distinction,"

replied Mrs. Verney. "It is a mind sufficient for itself, requiring no support, and therefore not always ready to exert itself. But he can be drawn out by those who understand him;" and acting upon her own suggestions, Mrs. Verney dexterously insinuated herself into the political conversation, and compelled her nephew to give her his attention and his opinion.

But she failed in persuading him to display himself. He answered her, but it was with only that amount of interest which politeness required, and he shrank back into what Mrs. Verney called his shell, and, with a smile, she banteringly told him that he was so nervous and so pre-engrossed, she would wait till after the next day to gain his attention.

The ladies left the dinner-table. Mrs. Verney persuaded Mrs. Cameron to go and rest in her boudoir. Rosamond also withdrew. Coffee was brought in, the ordinary circle was formed, the ordinary little nothings were said, and the spirit of *ennui* was 'stealing over the party. Juliet looked at the time-piece.

"Five minutes to the half hour! Myra ought to be here. Hark!"

A carriage was distinctly heard, the wheels crashing over the gravel. Juliet and Annette rushed down the stairs.

"How pleasant it is to see such sisterly affec-

tion!" murmured Mrs. Verney. "Elise, my love, I wish you would just go and prepare Mrs. Cameron for dear Myra's arrival. Mrs. Cameron is so sadly nervous," she continued, addressing the party generally, "and she has been painfully excited by Myra's delay. But it is all over now. I felt sure myself that nothing could occur to mar the general happiness on an occasion so auspicious."

There was a bustle on the staircase, a murmur of voices; then Elise Verney came back, saying that Myra was gone to her mother. She was not looking at all well; the journey had fatigued her a good deal, and they had had a bad crossing.

Everyone was immediately very sorry, but thought it quite natural, and had no doubt she would soon recover; and then each lady who had enjoyed the privilege of crossing the Channel felt anxious to relate her experience, and listened with polite impatience to her neighbour's details, till she could find an occasion to introduce her own. So the stiffness of the party wore off, and Mrs. Verney, perceiving that the conversation had become more general, took the opportunity of stealing out of the room, with a really good-natured wish to know something about Myra.

She met Annette in the corridor. "Myra is with mamma. We have been sent away. Mrs. Verney, is there anything the matter?" and Annette, who was naturally timid, and really tender-hearted, crept

up to Mrs. Verney's side, and looked up anxiously in her face.

"The matter, my dear, no. What should be the matter? Poor little Myra is tired. Just go and tell Rosamond that she must come down and make herself agreeable. I will go and speak to your mamma."

"But Myra looked as if she was unhappy," said Annette, "and mamma exclaimed so when she saw her; and she is ill, I am sure."

"My dear Annette, do not let your little head be disturbed with fancies. Go and fetch Rosamond, and stay quietly in the drawing-room. Tell Rosamond I shall return in a few minutes. When the gentlemen come up we must have some music."

"The gentlemen are coming up now," exclaimed Annette; "I must go and tell Mr. Verney that Myra is come; he will be so glad." But Mr. Verney was not there, he was still in the dining-room talking politics, Edmund said, and Annette must not trouble him about Myra; he would know about her quite as soon as he wished. Annette went back to the drawing-room discomfited, and Mrs. Verney, not without a slight feeling of curiosity, knocked at the door of Mrs. Cameron's boudoir.

"Come in," was said in a weak voice, and Mrs. Verney opened the door just as Myra, who had been kneeling by her mother's sofa, started up, endeavouring to appear as if she had been standing.

"Charmed, most charmed to see you, love," said Mrs. Verney, kissing her; "you have had a wretched journey, I hear; a miserable crossing. Let me see how you are looking." She gently laid her hand on Myra's shoulder, and turned her to the light, as she might have done when she was a child of ten years old.

Myra bore the touch bravely, but her answer was, in spite of herself, chilling. "They had had rather a rough passage, but it was nothing like that of the previous day."

"And you have been surprised, excited, your nerves are shaken — you were not prepared for this sudden and most interesting event? Dear Mrs. Cameron, she will do well to retire to rest immediately, after having eaten something. Do n't you think so?"

"I wish to go into the drawing-room," said Myra, decidedly; "mamma, if you do n't object, I will go and dress at once."

"It is a strange fancy, my dear," was the reply; "very unlike yourself." And Mrs. Cameron appealed to Mrs. Verney: "She does not look like herself, does she? I was quite startled when I saw her at first."

"Feverish," said Mrs. Verney, with a smile; "feverish from excitement, but it will wear off. Are you quite certain, my love, that you will do wisely in attempting to see your friends to-night? You will

have such a very trying day to-morrow; and you must be up early, so must we all."

"And I want Conyers to try on your dress," said Mrs. Cameron; "I should like to see it on myself. Indeed, it is so late, Myra, I think you will do much better not to think of appearing in the drawing-room; no one will expect you."

"You have seen Rosamond, of course," said Mrs. Verney.

"She has seen no one but myself and the two children, I believe," observed Mrs. Cameron. "We were just having a little talk about the marriage when you came in, my dear Mrs. Verney. I was telling her that she must not put on a sad face, when her sister is going to be so happy."

"Dear child! She was always so sensitive," murmured Mrs. Verney. "But you will see Rosamond looking so bright, my love; and Charles is supremely happy."

Alas! for Myra, and that unfortunate impossibility of concealing her feelings which entirely prevented her being a heroine. Her face expressed a mixture of impatience and misery, which the effort to subdue only served to intensify.

"Mamma, I think I should like to go to my own room," was all the answer she could make.

"Do so, my dear. Make yourself comfortable, and tell Conyers what you would like to have — a little tea, I suppose; and perhaps some chicken, or a cutlet; order just what you fancy."

"I can't eat," said Myra, "my head aches; and I have not seen Rosamond, or" — her voice was scarcely audible, as she added — "Mr. Verney."

Mrs. Verney laughed. "Oh! is that it? The old fancy. Well! I must say you are constant; and you need not be at all jealous; he is devoted to you still."

"He has been looking forward to seeing you all day," said Mrs. Cameron. "Suppose," and she turned to Mrs. Verney — "Would it be troubling you very much to ask him to come and see Myra here? The gentlemen must be out of the dining-room by this time."

"Oh! mamma, no, not here;" Myra paused, conscious of the strangeness of her words; then added, "It will tire you; and, indeed, if I may, I should like to go into the drawing-room."

"But with a headache, my dear, and having had nothing to eat?"

"Poor child! she won't be satisfied till she has had him all to herself," said Mrs. Verney. "I daresay she has something very important to say to him. They were always famed for having secrets, and I think under the circumstances we may trust them."

Mrs. Cameron received the suggestion quite literally. "I do n't understand," she said. "Mr. Verney can come here very well, and then Myra can have something to eat and go to bed; that seems to me the most sensible notion."

"I have not seen papa, either," persisted Myra.

"Homesick for everyone, I perceive," said Mrs. Verney. "What do you say to indulging her, my dear Mrs. Cameron, and allowing her to go into the drawing-room just as she is? The party are all relations, or intimate friends, and they will quite understand that she is just come off a journey."

"As you will," said Mrs. Cameron, languidly. "I do n't think I can appear again to-night myself; I am quite exhausted. I should like to see Rosamond before she goes to bed; and Myra, my dear, when you go up stairs remember you must put on your dress, and let Conyers see that it fits. I think I may depend upon her, do n't you?" she added, speaking to Mrs. Verney.

"Without doubt; or Rosamond will look at it, I am sure. Now Myra, love, just go and take off your bonnet, and make your hair smooth, and then I will introduce you, as you wish it so much."

But Myra had just arrived at the conclusion that she did not wish it at all, that she had made a most foolish blunder, and in her intense dread of drawing upon herself unnecessary remark, had decided, as is so often the case, upon the very line of conduct which would be the most remarkable. All through the long journey she had been endeavouring to plan how she should meet Mr. Verney, and what excuse she could make for seeing him alone; and finding herself unable to determine a question which could only be settled by the circumstances of the moment,

she had worked herself up into a state of nervous uncertainty, which was the sure precursor of a blunder. She had already drawn upon herself her mother's attention, and Mrs. Verney's, and now she was going to do what of all things she most dreaded, face a large party, who would look at and watch her; and perhaps, after all, she might fail in finding the moment which she desired for begging to speak with Mr. Verney alone. As she passed the drawing-room, on her way to her own room, she stopped; the door was half open, and she looked in. Mr. Verney was there, standing with his back to her, drinking coffee, and talking to some ladies. Myra forgot she could be seen, and stood riveted to the spot, her heart beating violently. Perhaps he would turn and see her; if so, he would surely come and speak to her; and once she was nearly certain that he did see her. But he walked to the other end of the room immediately afterwards, and Myra could then only follow her own much regretted idea, and prepare herself for the drawing-room ordeal.

Happily, other persons had considered her comfort more than she was inclined to do herself, and when she went to her room she found Annette there, and a very comfortable repast provided; the bridesmaid's white tarlatan dress, with its pale blue ribbons, was spread upon the bed, and Conyers was waiting to put it on, as soon as she was ready. Myra, thankful for any delay, sent Annette to beg Mrs. Verney

not to wait for her, and poured herself out a cup of tea, but she could eat nothing.

"If you do n't eat, Miss Myra, perhaps you would try on your dress at once," said Conyers, "and then I could set about altering it, if there should be anything to be altered."

"Oh, no, Conyers! not to-night; I can't. Take it away, please."

"But indeed, Miss Myra, it will only take five minutes."

"Impossible! It must be by and by. Annette, I shall be ready directly." Myra pushed away her cup, turned to the glass to arrange her hair and her dress, and make herself look, as Annette said, presentable, and hurried down stairs.

"Shall we wait for Mrs. Verney?" said Annette, as they paused before the drawing-room door. Myra made no answer; her nervousness had become desperation, and they went in.

The room, which was not large, was well filled and well lighted; and as Myra entered, a brilliant duet on the harp and piano was just beginning; and the general attention being thus pre-occupied, she contrived to reach the middle of the apartment without notice. Then a cousin perceived her, and came up and spoke; then an aunt, and a friend, her father, and Rosamond, and, in a few minutes, she was the centre of a little circle, all making eager and loud inquiries, under the protection of the clanging chords

of Donizetti's opera. But where was Mr. Verney? Still not seeing her, but talking in a distant corner to General Mainwaring, who, being an old man with grey hair, and a Member of Parliament besides, had been looked upon by Myra with awe from her infancy. To interrupt such a conversation would have been an unpardonable disrespect. The music ceased. Myra hoped Mr. Verney would move, and he did move; he turned round, saw her, came up to her, shook hands heartily, said a few kind words — so kind, indeed, that Myra felt herself the basest of hypocrites — and then went back again to his politics. What else could she have expected? Her anxiety to speak to him alone became all but unsupportable. One or two of the party who were to have beds in the village were preparing to take their leave. Mrs. Verney came up and begged her to go to bed also. Rosamond urged the same request, promising to come to her room for a few minutes' chat. Her father made a remark upon her pale face, and told her she was foolish in remaining; and Myra felt tired, so that she could scarcely stand; and bewildered and feverish, so that she could with difficulty bring herself to make a rational answer to anything that was said; and still lingered, and persisted in lingering, until Mr. Cameron sternly ordered her to go at once, and the die was cast.

Myra wished a general "good night," and, walking up to Mr. Verney, interrupting him in the middle of a sentence, said, in a very low trembling

voice, "I have something to say to you. Will you come with me to the school-room?"

"Certainly, if you desire it;" but the expression of his face at that moment Myra never forgot.

"A private *tête-à-tête*," said Mrs. Verney, as they passed her in the corridor. "That is not at all proper; but I suppose you are forestalling the privilege of brother and sister. Good night, dear Myra; we meet at ten to-morrow. Charles, the Colonel wishes to go; are we to wait and take you home, or send the carriage back?"

"Send it back, if you will; I like to be independent."

"And to have a few last words with Rosamond. Well, it is very natural! Good night, once more, dear;" and Mrs. Verney kissed Myra. "How burningly hot your forehead is! Pray go to bed soon, or you will be ill again."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE school-room was but dimly illuminated by the one candle which Myra placed upon the centre table. Mr. Verney threw himself into a chair, his face turned partially away from the light. He was the first to speak.

"Well, dear child, it is late; you must say your say quickly."

"As quickly as I can; but, oh, Mr. Verney! I think you know!" And Myra drew near, and raised her eyes to him timidly.

"Know! I know a good many things. You must really speak plainly, if I am to understand you."

"You will be angry — it may not be my business, — but it has made me so very unhappy. I saw Miss Stuart and Mrs. Tracy at St. Wolfgang."

"He turned round and looked her full in the face. "Really! and I suppose they inquired after me?"

No answer. Myra was too much amazed to speak.

"They are old acquaintances of mine," he continued. "Perhaps they talked about me?"

"Yes, they talked; they said — but Mrs. Tracy did not wish me to repeat it all, only I must."

"My dear little girl, this is too silly. What do you mean by keeping me here, after ten o'clock at night, to tell me what some lady would not like me to hear. You have some senseless conscience-crotchet in your head, Myra; but you are growing too old to indulge such folly."

"It is not a conscience-crotchet," exclaimed Myra, recovering her self-possession, as her pride was roused by Mr. Verney's tone; "It is truth and right."

"Indeed!"

That "indeed" was generally too much for Myra's self-confidence, there was such absolute superiority in it. Yet she continued, boldly: "Mr. Verney, if you were engaged to Miss Stuart, you had no right to engage yourself at the same time to Rosamond."

"Oh! you have heard that folly, have you? Dear child, I quite agree with you. If I am engaged to Miss Stuart, I cannot at the same time be engaged to your sister Rosamond."

"But Miss Stuart considered you were engaged to her."

"What a young lady considers is one thing; what is actually the fact, another. My dear Myra, take my advice, and go to bed, and do n't trouble

yourself any more with matters which don't concern you. Rosamond and I quite understand each other, and any interference with us will only produce mischief."

"But Mrs. Tracy said the same — at least, that it had been an engagement; she did not say it was actually so now."

"Mrs. Tracy knows the state of things too well to make any such absurd assertion."

"There is no absurdity in it, Mr. Verney," said Myra, very gravely. "I do n't know how things are at this moment, but I do know that you were engaged, and as a proof ——" She paused, and laid upon the table the little case containing the ring and the lock of hair.

As he took them up she saw his colour change. "I have a message for you," continued Myra. "Miss Stuart bids you take your choice between the two. You asked for the hair; if you keep it she feels that you will return to her. You gave her the ring; if you accept it back again, she will know that you are gone from her for ever."

"Rosamond will thank you for this," was the answer.

"I know; it may seem treacherous, but they were given me. Oh, Mr. Verney! I have been very wretched."

"Because you have interfered with affairs which are quite out of your province," continued Mr. Verney, sternly. "I did give this ring; I did ask

for this hair. I was like other men. Rosamond knows it; she is satisfied. You need ask no more."

"And Miss Stuart is miserable," said Myra.

Mr. Verney leaned his head upon his hand, as he said, in an under tone, "And I have been miserable also."

"I may return the hair?" asked Myra.

There was no reply.

"And I may tell my father all that I know," she continued.

"Tell your father!" Mr. Verney started from his seat. "Myra, do you think I am a man likely to endure this monstrous, this unheard-of, interference. Tell your father! Yes, tell him at your peril."

"I must tell him," was Myra's firm answer.

Mr. Verney's tone changed. "Even so — tell him if you will," he said. "Go to him, let him know how you have forgotten your duty to your sister — how you have striven to mar her happiness — hear what he will say."

"I must tell him all that Mrs. Tracy told me," persisted Myra.

"All! What all? Mrs. Tracy knows there is no engagement now."

"Mrs. Tracy spoke of other things besides the engagement," said Myra, hesitatingly.

"Mark me, Myra, if you have been listening to lies, and are now going to repeat them, God knows

how bitterly you will repent it. Let me hear what Mrs. Tracy said."

"She told me things which I must repeat to my father," began Myra; but Mr. Verney interrupted her.

"Then Mrs. Tracy is a false hypocrite, and if Rosamond is rendered miserable for life, it will be her doing and yours, Myra. And we trusted you: yes, we trusted you more than any other human being!"

"And I was wrong in consenting to be so trusted," said Myra. "That also shall I say to papa."

Mr. Verney rose and walked up and down the room.

"I have been very unhappy," continued Myra, "and I cannot bear the feeling of having done wrong any longer. And, Mr. Verney, if there is no truth in what Mrs. Tracy said, you will very easily explain everything to papa."

"Myra, listen to me. You are bound in honour to tell me the accusations made against me, before you repeat them to anyone. I require you to do so."

Mr. Verney placed himself before her, and looked at her with an expression of determination, before which she actually quailed.

"I think I am bound to do so," she replied. "I wished to speak to you now for that reason. I will try and remember it all."

"Yes, all; let there be no reserve, no prevarication."

The colour mounted to Myra's cheek, and she looked up at him indignantly. "Mr. Verney, you have no right to use that word. I do not know how to prevaricate. Mrs. Tracy told me that you were greatly in debt, that even if you were to return to India your income would not be sufficient to set you free, and that your private fortune was all gone, because it was mixed up with Mr. Stuart's affairs, which within the last two months had become so involved there was no hope of retrieving them. And she said, also, that if it had not been for these money difficulties you would have married Miss Stuart. This is what I must tell papa," she added; "he must know it to-night."

Mr. Verney had listened with a countenance absolutely impassive; when Myra concluded, a sharp, satirical, light laugh seemed to ring through the apartment, as he said, "Is that all?"

"Yes, all."

"Thank you, I suppose I may be allowed to spare you the trouble of communicating these important facts, or exaggerations, or falsehoods, or with whatever name they may be dignified, to your father?"

Myra gazed at him in utter perplexity.

"You have no wish, I imagine, to place yourself in an unfitting or improper position," he continued.

"I wish to tell papa what Mrs. Tracy told me," said Myra, "and I intend to do so."

"Precisely so; that is, you wish Mr. Cameron to know. If I tell him, you will be equally satisfied."

Myra hesitated. "I must tell him that I was wrong in sending the letters," she said.

"We will leave your little confessions for the present. They are not exactly to the point. Time presses. I desire you simply to understand that I relieve you from your mission."

"And you will say it all?" said Myra. "But Mrs. Tracy, I am sure, wished me to say it myself."

"We will forget Mrs. Tracy. The question lies between you and me."

"Oh! Mr. Verney, you would not deceive me," said Myra, and she looked at him with an expression of such child-like, earnest truth, that the cold-hearted, cynical man of the world was touched by it, and he answered with a sincerity which could not be doubted —

"Myra, on the word of a man of honour, I will not marry your sister until your father knows everything that is to be known about me."

"And I may speak to him myself after you have spoken to him?" said Myra.

He turned from her abruptly.

"I do n't doubt — I can't. Oh, Mr. Verney, forgive me!"

There was a silence of some seconds. Mr. Verney kept his face partially averted. Then he answered in a voice from which all bitterness was gone — “Say to him what you will to-morrow. Now, good night.”

Myra burst into tears.

“Poor child!” he took her hand tenderly, and she allowed it to rest in his, whilst scarcely articulate through her sobs came the words: “If you will only say you forgive me!”

“God bless you. I am not worthy to forgive you.” The last sentence was uttered as if spoken to himself, and before Myra could add another word he had left her.

Myra listened to his footsteps along the corridor and thought he went back to the drawing-room, and after vainly trying to hide the traces of tears on her face she went up to her own room. Conyers was waiting for her with the bridesmaid's dress.

“Oh, Miss Myra! how could you be so forgetful and stay so late! Your mamma has rung for me twice, to know if the dress fits.”

“I am so tired,” was Myra's most true answer. “Conyers, you must leave it.”

Conyers merely replied by assisting Myra to unfasten the dress she wore, and to put on the other.

“Miss Cameron wished to come in and see it on, Miss Myra; I believe she promised your mamma she would. It looks very nice, does n't it now?”

Conyers moved the glass so that Myra might look at herself.

It was a startling contrast, that bridal attire and the pale face of distress. Myra glanced at herself for an instant, and then sat down with a look of such utter wretchedness that Conyers, interpreting it as fatigue, looked quite alarmed.

"Shall I go and call Miss Cameron?" she asked, when Myra seemed a little recovered.

"Yes, if you will. Tell her to come quickly;" and when Conyers was gone Myra walked up and down the room with her hands clasped together, repeating a few words of prayer, which, though wandering and unconnected, soothed her with the consciousness of not being left to bear her burden alone.

Cheerful, bright, good-natured, looking as if it had been morning instead of night, Rosamond came. Myra scarcely knew what she said or did; she only felt that every tone of her sister's voice went through her as if it had been the thrust of a dagger.

"You are tired, poor darling," said Rosamond, giving a hasty glance of inspection. "The dress does very well. Go to bed."

"Is everyone else gone? Mr. Verney?"

"Not yet, I think. Shall I take him your love?" and she laughed.

Myra sank down upon the nearest chair.

"Oh child, to rumple your dress in that way! Take it off, Conyers, and put her into bed. Good night."

Myra just managed to say "good night," and that was all. Happily, perhaps, for herself, she was by this time so utterly worn out that she could only leave herself in Conyers' hands to be undressed.

"Do n't call her too early in the morning, Conyers," was Rosamond's last good-natured speech. "She won't be wanted till it is time to go to church."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"EIGHT o'clock, Miss Myra. Indeed you must be quick."

Myra started from a heavy yet disturbed sleep, and sat up in bed, scarcely conscious where she was.

"Your sisters are very nearly ready, and the bridesmaids are all to have their breakfast together in the school-room; and my mistress hopes you will be able to go down and attend to them, Miss Myra: so please make haste. Can I help you?"

"Thank you, Conyers, no. I do n't want help; but is papa dressed?"

"I can't say, Miss; not yet though, I fancy."

"But can I see him? Was he very late last night? Do you think I can see him?"

"Indeed, Miss Myra, if you would only dress yourself you could settle all that afterwards. Your mamma is so fidgety about the school-room breakfast."

"If you will leave me, Conyers, I will be as quick as I can. Juliet must begin without me. Pray go."

There was an intense irritability in Myra's tone. Conyers departed.

Was it then Rosamond's wedding morning? Were there no difficulties — no obstacles? Had Mr. Verney really satisfied her father? And had Myra only dreamt of some terrible discovery? She listened to the sounds in the house: all was stir, excitement, preparation. Juliet's voice was heard on the stairs — loud and merry. She wanted Conyers to alter her sash; the bridesmaids did not like the way their sashes had been made up, and must have them put on differently. Then came Annette with rather a whining voice, complaining that she should never be ready in time; then a cousin, who stood in Rosamond's doorway, called "Conyers" in the authoritative tone which belongs to the chief confidante of the chief personage on an important occasion; and again Conyers, doubtless actuated by some secret misgiving, knocked at Myra's door, to inquire how long it would be before she was ready — and Myra started up and began to dress.

She always dressed slowly: her mind was apt to wander to subjects which interested her; and this morning she was awkward and nervous, and everything went wrong. Again and again messages were sent to hurry her, and then the nervousness increased; and she longed, oh, so earnestly! to have a quiet time for her prayers; and when she knelt down she could not collect her thoughts or express what

she wanted to say; and just as she had begun to be a little composed another knock made her start up, and she had to answer some trivial question, which irritated her, and made her feel quite wicked. It was very trying; but more trying than all was a sense of unreality, which made her several times pause as if something in her mind was wrong; as if in some way she had been under a great delusion, and had not yet awakened from it.

But she was dressed at last, and went down to breakfast. A merry party was assembled. Juliet was pouring out coffee and Annette tea. Henrietta and Elise Verney with the other bridesmaids, making in all eight, were assembled. They were all talking eagerly when Myra came in.

"Look," said Juliet, holding up a ring to her, "look what was found on the mantel-piece this morning. There is carefulness!"

Myra turned quite white, but answered gently, "The ring is not mine."

"Not yours! What will you say next? You know Mr. Verney gave it you last night, and the case is on your dressing-table at this moment. Won't I tell him what a value you put upon his gifts! I wish he had offered it to me."

"Please give me the ring, Juliet," replied Myra; "and will you let me have some coffee?"

"Do give her the ring, Juliet," said Henrietta Verney, who was sitting near her. "She does not

look well enough to bear being teased this morning."

"But she says it is not hers," said Juliet. "Then it must be Mr. Verney's, and I shall give it back to him."

"Oh no, Juliet! indeed you must not. Let me have it," exclaimed Myra. "I know about it, only it is not mine."

"Then there is a mystery," exclaimed Juliet, looking round triumphantly, "and I was right. How I will torment Mr. Verney! I could not imagine what you and he had to say to each other such a long time last night."

The remark drew the general attention upon Myra, who sat drinking her coffee, and trying to look unconscious and indifferent, whilst the trembling of her hand and the paleness of her lips plainly betrayed her agitation.

Glances passed around. Henrietta Verney whispered to a servant to bring a little sal-volatile, but the whisper reached Myra's ears, and had a most strengthening effect. She looked up and smiled, and said she was much obliged, but she was quite well. The journey of the day before had been fatiguing, but she should be quite herself after breakfast; and then the remarks ceased apparently, but a certain feeling of curiosity and suspicion had been awakened, which was not lessened by the tone in which Myra asked, whether anyone had seen her father that morning.

"I see him now," exclaimed Annette, as she turned to the window. "He is walking across the lawn with the Archdeacon. They are going to the church, I am sure, to be sure that everything is right."

Myra pushed aside her coffee-cup and hurried to the door.

"Myra, Myra, where are you going?" exclaimed Juliet. "There are a thousand things we want to say and arrange. You must not go."

"I must speak to papa," said Myra. She hurried out of the room, and Annette watched her rushing across the lawn.

"Something is the matter," observed Juliet oracularly. Everyone else seemed to think the same, and a party gathered round the window.

"In her white dress and without a bonnet! So like Myra it is," murmured Annette. "I do believe she will go out into the high road."

"The Archdeacon will think her mad," said Juliet.

"She has not caught up with them though," exclaimed a young cousin. "Just look, she is coming back."

"I don't believe papa is going to the church," said Juliet. "He has turned down towards the Rectory. Can't you see him crossing the bridge?"

Myra returned almost immediately, and said quietly, "Dr. Kingsbury is not so well this morning,

and has asked to see papa. He will be back again directly."

"Oh! then you did catch up with him," exclaimed Juliet. "What did the Archdeacon think of you? He must have been very much astonished."

"I did not speak to the Archdeacon," replied Myra, and her voice grew husky as she added — "they don't think Dr. Kingsbury will live through the day."

A general silence fell upon the party.

At that instant the door was thrown open rather widely, and Rosamond, in her bridal dress of white silk, with an orange-blossom wreath and lace veil, entered the room. A murmur of admiration passed from mouth to mouth. Rosamond's figure was exquisitely graceful. Her delicate complexion was tinged by excitement, her blue eyes, usually rather hard and cold, were softened into an expression which was almost tender in its sweetness, whilst her small mouth was brightened with a smile of the most perfect amiability. No man could have looked at her that morning without believing that he who could win her for his wife must have a prospect of perfect happiness. The more cynical of her own sex might indeed have traced an absence of perfect simplicity in her movements, and a tone of satisfied vanity in the gentle greeting which she gave her friends; but it was surely not more than might be considered natural under the circumstances. What failing is so inherent in a woman's nature as vanity?

It is the last fault which, except in aggravated cases, the world feels called upon to condemn. It is the first which anyone earnestly yearning to serve God with a perfect heart will labour to uproot.

"Mamma told me she had promised you I should come and show myself;" and Rosamond advanced into the centre of the room. "Myra, love, how are you this morning? You don't look as if you had slept an hour."

Myra looked at her for an instant in silent admiration, and, kissing her, whispered — "Oh, Rosamond, are you happy?"

"Yes, dear child, quite happy — quite. Do you doubt?" and Rosamond laughed.

Myra said not another word, but turned to go away.

"The carriages will be here almost directly, and the bridesmaids are to go first, Myra," exclaimed Juliet, following her.

"I must wait for papa," said Myra. She paused in the doorway.

"He may stay with Dr. Kingsbury till the last moment," observed Juliet.

"Ah, poor Dr. Kingsbury! I am so sorry. It is dreadfully unfortunate," murmured Rosamond. "I should so have liked him to perform the ceremony."

"Please, Myra, don't keep us waiting," persisted Juliet. "Where are you going now?"

"To mamma's room. I have not seen her this morning."

"But Conyers is with her, and she will be worried if she is interrupted. Do stay here, and let us keep an eye upon you."

"Please not, Juliet. I — I don't feel very well." No one thought of asking what was the matter, and Myra shut herself up in her own room.

Those next minutes of waiting, how endless, how intolerable they appeared! One or two carriages drew up, and as each one came near Myra expected the summons. Several times she fancied she heard her father's voice. Several times she believed that she was called herself. Then came the suggestion not to worry herself any more — to forget Mrs. Tracy, to trust Mr. Verney, to believe that it was all right. Then all kinds of absurd impossible wishes entered her head — that she could run down to the Rectory — see her father — see the dear old Rector — tell all she had to tell there. Oh! why had she delayed? It must have been cowardice. If she had not so dreaded an interview with her father, surely she would have sought it more. And if all should not be right! Now, at the very last moment! — her heart turned sick with fear, and just at that moment the call rang through the corridor, "The carriages are ready for the bridesmaids. No time to be lost."

Juliet rushed to Myra's room. Conyers also was at hand.

"Your mamma has sent me, Miss Myra, that she may be quite sure your dress is right."

"I must see papa" was all Myra could say.

"Papa!" interposed Juliet. "Nonsense, Myra, it is impossible."

"Indeed, Miss Myra, it won't do to wait. Can I tell him anything for you?" asked Conyers.

Another impatient call for the bridesmaids, and almost at the same instant some one was heard to say, "The carriage is to take Mr. Cameron up at the Rectory."

Myra turned to her sister with sudden dignity of manner. "Go, Juliet, I will follow directly;" and Juliet rather awed and repelled, though she did not know why, ran downstairs.

Myra leaned back in the carriage, and spoke not a word till they reached the church.

The bridesmaids were to wait in the school-room, which was close adjoining. There the little procession was to be formed, and the school-children were already in attendance, prepared to strew flowers in the bride's path. Several gentlemen were standing about, watching for the carriage which was to come by the Rectory road. Inquiries were made for Mr. Verney, but the Stormont party had not yet arrived.

The Archdeacon drove up, and there was a

feeling of impatience and disappointment. He went into the vestry, and Godfrey Cameron followed him.

Still no carriage from the Rectory; but presently came a great rumble of wheels, and the Stormont carriage and four stopped before the west porch. The school-children crowded round so that no one could exactly see who got out, but it was to be supposed that Mr. Verney was one of the number. Myra pressed to the doorway, and even went a few steps into the road. As the difficulty of approaching her father increased, the misgivings, the fears, the reproaches of her possibly over-scrupulous conscience awoke to agony.

"They are coming — yes, coming. Now then." Juliet pulled Myra back, and the bridal carriage drew up.

Godfrey came out of the vestry and went into the school-room. "The Archdeacon and Mr. Bathurst are quite ready; form yourselves properly — the Stormont people are in the church."

Myra deliberately left her place, and to the consternation of everyone went up to her father as he got out of the carriage, and laid her hand on his arm. "Papa, I must speak with you."

Mr. Cameron's face was like a thunder-cloud. "Speak, child! Now? Folly!"

"Papa" — she drew him aside, and her voice trembled, so that she was scarcely intelligible — "have you seen Mr. Verney? Is it all right?"

"Seen him? He is here. Of course all is right. Go, child, go; don't think you are to arrange things."

Myra shrank away crushed; but she joined the procession into the church. The building was crowded. All the village people were there, the farmers, and many of the neighbouring gentry, who were to be present at the breakfast afterwards.

Rosamond, leaning on her father's arm, walked composedly up the aisle, the eight bridesmaids following. Mr. Cameron glanced round for Mr. Verney, so did Godfrey, Edmund, the Archdeacon; so also did Colonel Verney and the Stormont guests. Where was he? Some one whispered, "he must have forgotten the ring, or the license;" and the murmur was handed round, but still people looked surprised.

Mr. Cameron went up to Colonel Verney. "Is he coming? What is the matter?"

"Coming! He must be here. Who came with him?"

No one. The Hall party had believed he was to accompany Colonel Verney. Colonel Verney had understood that Mr. Verney was gone to the Hall.

The buzz in the church became audible. One or two persons left their places and went out into the churchyard to look. Rosamond was led to a seat, still outwardly retaining perfect self-possession. Myra clasped her hands tightly together, and neither

trembled nor felt bewildered, for the hour for courage was come.

Mr. Cameron, with his head erect, and insensible to the gazing crowd, walked down the aisle, and in a loud authoritative tone ordered that Colonel Verney's carriage should drive back instantly to Stormont. "Mr. Verney had mistaken the hour."

The coachman mounted the coach-box, and gathered up the reins, and was about to drive off, when a boy was seen running at full speed down the lane from the Hall.

"A message, sir," said the Stormont footman, touching his hat. "Shall we wait for it?"

"Yes, wait." Mr. Cameron walked forward a few steps.

The footman brought back a letter directed to Myra.

"The young fellow says, sir, that he met Mr. Verney about an hour and a half ago near the railway station, and that he gave him this note and told him to take it to the Hall."

"An hour and a half ago!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron.

"Yes, sir; the boy says he knows it ought to have been given sooner, but he was obliged to go somewhere else first."

Mr. Cameron took the note, examined it, almost broke the seal.

"Go for Miss Myra — bid her come here."

The man entered the church, and went up to Myra.

All eyes were fixed upon her. Mrs. Verney came up to her, begging to be told what was the matter. So did Colonel Verney. Curiosity became intense. The congregation were leaving their seats and crowding into the aisles. Rosamond remained in her place, but she was deadly pale. Edmund Cameron alone thought for Myra, and, drawing her arm within his, led her down the church. She leaned upon him still as her father put the letter into her hands. The envelope enclosed another letter addressed to Mr. Cameron. The lines addressed to herself were few.

"You will give this to your father. I have entered into no explanations; but after the doubts expressed in your conversation last night, and which, I imagine, will be shared by all your family, it is impossible for me to fulfill my engagement. I leave it to you to comfort Rosamond, if she should require comfort." C. V.

Myra gave the note to her brother, and tried to speak, but her voice failed her, and she almost fell to the ground. Edmund lifted her into one of the carriages and went up to Mr. Cameron.

"We must take Rosamond home, sir. Shall I fetch her?"

Mr. Cameron's face was livid with rage. He threw

Mr. Verney's letter to the ground, and as he clenched his hands, for perhaps the first time in his life an oath escaped him.

"Shall I fetch her, sir?" repeated Edmund.

There was no answer; but Mr. Cameron strode up the aisle, and, without uttering a single word of explanation, led Rosamond from the church, placed her in the carriage by Myra's side, seated himself by her, and in a tone of thunder gave the order to drive to the Hall.

Then, like the rush of a storm, the congregation poured forth from the church — clergymen, bridesmaids, relations, friends, spectators — in one mingled crowd, and through them all, as they gathered at the entrance, dashed the Stormont carriage and four, with Colonel Verney shouting frantically to the coachman, "To the Hall! to the Hall!" and Mrs. Verney, even then not forgetting her propriety, endeavouring to calm him by reminding him that it might be there was nothing really amiss.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE whole brunt of that terrible storm for the first few hours fell upon Myra. If she had but told all that she knew public exposure might have been prevented. So it is that in this world the innocent suffer for the deeds of the guilty, and the comparatively small offence on which the public eye is fixed is exaggerated into a crime, whilst the hidden but grievous sin which God will condemn at the last Day is overlooked, and even justified. But Myra was brave now. There was no surprise or hesitation, and nothing to conceal. She had been led into a difficulty by first consenting to become a party to Rosamond and Mr. Verney's deception, and circumstances had aggravated it till she could find no way of escape. So far she confessed herself in the wrong, and bore with quietness and humility the reproaches which were lavished upon her. Her brother Edmund alone defended her. A straightforward unselfish character instinctively understands the feelings of one which resembles it; and when Myra, after narrating all that she knew, left her father's study, bowed down by the thought of his anger, it was Edmund who undertook to put her conduct in its

true light. Much indeed, she needed such help. Godfrey lectured her; her mother cried, and asked how she could have kept it all from them; Juliet tormented her by triumphantly reminding her that she had known from the first there was some mystery; and Rosamond, her pride stung to the quick, turned away when Myra would have kissed her, with the cold words, "Thank you, I require no pity," and shut herself up in her room, till she could nerve herself to the due amount of haughty contempt which she believed her position demanded.

And whilst Myra's fault was thus exaggerated because it had brought a wound to the family vanity, Rosamond was excused, pitied, and caressed, and even Mr. Verney escaped with a less share of indignation than might have been anticipated. When Edmund endeavoured to exculpate Myra, and spoke of Mr. Verney as he deserved, Mr. Cameron sharply replied, "The man is a scoundrel; I desire never to hear his name again. But your sister, Edmund, is a little fool."

And this state of feeling continued, until a visit from Colonel Verney had directed Mr. Cameron's wrath into a more just and natural channel. Thoroughly shocked and distressed, the good-natured Colonel had at first vented a torrent of indignation upon his nephew; and pity upon Rosamond; and having driven away from the Hall, which he declared he could never have the face to enter again, he had stated his intention of following the missing

bridegroom, and demanding a full explanation of his conduct. But Mrs. Verney, more cautious, and with a more clear comprehension of the true state of the case, quieted this fever of excitement, and the Colonel then was only anxious to go back to Mr. Cameron, and make the apology which he felt the honour of the Verney name demanded.

A most excellent intention, entrusted, alas! to most unfitting hands. The Colonel began his apology, and it was accepted stiffly, with the addition of some very cutting remarks upon the deception which had been practised. He did his best to agree, but being touchy upon the point of the family honour, he did not feel inclined to hear from another what he would have been the first to say himself, and offered a slight excuse. Mr. Cameron was bitter, the Colonel hasty. One retort followed another, and when at length the Colonel suggested that it was a pity, since Myra knew all about it, she had not had the good sense to speak, in time to prevent the unhappy exposure. Mr. Cameron turned round and proudly defended his child, and for the first time discovered that, but for her interposition, Rosamond would at that moment have been the wife of an unprincipled beggar.

The speech was the turning point for Myra, and from that moment she had no more reproaches to fear. But it was also the culminating point for Colonel Verney, and in fiery indignation he strode from the room, vowing, with asseverations which

made Mr. Cameron's lip curl with pharisaical satisfaction, that he would allow himself to be torn to pieces rather than again demean himself to offer to that man the slightest shadow of an apology.

It was vain then, for even Mrs. Verney, who sought an interview immediately afterwards, to attempt to cast oil upon the troubled waters. And, indeed, for her the effort would probably under any circumstances have been useless. There are long seasons during which insincerity and flattery have influence, but they are seasons of prosperity, when the world goes smoothly with us. Mr. Cameron was now in no mood for flattery; he had exercised his practised powers of cross-examination in discovering from Myra and Rosamond every particular of the secret engagement, and he now plainly taxed Mrs. Verney with having been a party to it at the very time when she was suggesting the marriage to himself as a perfectly new idea. When she hesitated how to reply, he put on his most repelling manner, and suggested that for the future he should prefer for his family the society of persons who were not likely to be the sharers of such secrets. He believed that parents were the best, and the only lawful judges as to what would be for their children's good. No doubt Mrs. Verney had acted with the best intentions. As a gentleman speaking to a lady, he could not suppose otherwise; but in the present instance, her interference in his family affairs had, he grieved to say, been a signal failure. And with a stiff bow,

Mr. Cameron moved to the door, and Mrs. Verney had no alternative but to go. She went to Rosamond's room; and there another defeat awaited her. She offered pity and sympathy, and Rosamond was coldly indifferent, and needed no pity. Of wounded feeling she possessed very little, of wounded pride a great deal. Mr. Verney, she said, had of course at the last done the only thing which was possible to be done. She wished no excuse to be made for him. A man without principle could not be open to excuses. He had deceived and insulted her, but she left him to the world's condemnation, and certainly could only feel thankful that she had been saved the life-long disappointment which must have been hers if she had become his wife.

Mrs. Verney could say nothing in reply, and whenever this was the case, she always escaped as quickly as possible. She was still, however, full of regrets, full of affection. She only trusted that nothing that had occurred would weaken the friendly feeling which had lately been so increased between the two families. To which Rosamond replied, that whatever she might feel herself, she was afraid her father was not likely to forget or overlook the offence that had been offered; and then she sat silent. Mrs. Verney made a few common-place remarks, and departed, without even attempting to see Mrs. Cameron, the only person whom she might really have soothed, but whose influence in her own family was so small that it was not worth her while to

propitiate her. It was a very bitter disappointment to Mrs. Verney. If she could have retained the outward form of friendship with the Camerons, she might, by repudiating her nephew, have saved herself and her husband from any share in the odium of his conduct. But to quarrel with them, or to be supposed to do so, was at once to be imagined to take part with the man who had so grossly deceived and injured them. The world knows nothing of the inner working of such dissensions. It merely sees that persons are not friends; it can never tell why or how the unfriendliness has arisen, or to whom the fault is to be attributed. Mrs. Verney knew quite well that the world would talk, and that, if it talked, it would infallibly tell lies; and she would fain have stopped its mouth by a fact; the only way, indeed, by which the world can be silenced. She would willingly have pointed to the continued intimacy between the two families as a proof that the Colonel and herself were absolutely innocent; and very hard, indeed very unjust, it seemed to her, that she could not be allowed to do so. But so it was, and when she sat down to a family dinner that evening (the guests invited for the wedding having all departed), it was with the unpleasant thought that her neighbours were probably, at that moment, speculating how much or how little she and Colonel Verney had known of Mr. Verney's affairs, and deciding that, of course, they must have been aware of a good deal, as there was no doubt a decided

quarrel between them and the Camerons. For a woman who lived for the world, who basked in the sunshine of the world's favour, what imputation could be more galling?

For the first time in her life Mrs. Verney felt that she had blundered.

And at the Hall also there was a painful consciousness of the world's curious gaze, and of its unbridled tongue. But things were more simple, more open there. The feelings which were expressed were, in every case except Rosamond's, natural and real, and so there was less strain upon the party. The greater number of the wedding guests went away in the afternoon, but a few near relations remained, and as Rosamond kept to her room, and Myra waited upon her mother, who was too unwell to come down stairs, there was liberty for conversation and full expression of feeling, and this soothed Mr. Cameron by allowing him to assert his wounded dignity, and to congratulate himself more on what he had been saved from, than on what he had been called upon to bear.

Such an earthquake as the event of the morning would, it might have seemed, have upset a family for months, and yet on the evening of that same day there was a decided lull in the storm, and as the gentlemen sat together after dinner, there was even something like a not unpleasing excitement in going over what they had said, and thought, and feared, and suspected. After all they were not

sufferers. To the general eye, only Rosamond was really to be pitied, and how sharp that corroding pang of wounded pride and vanity really was, she was not likely to betray.

No one thought of Myra, except to call her a silly child for having trusted to the word of "such a fellow as Verney." No one in the least guessed or could have understood the wreck of feeling, the blank dreariness which fell upon her, when, having left her mother nearly asleep, she shut herself up in her own room to collect her thoughts, to remember and examine all that had occurred, to see if possible how she had been led wrong, how she could have done better, and to resolve — oh! how sorrowful is that first resolve to a young heart! — that she would for the future never allow herself to be deceived by the charm of talent or personal kindness, but that she would suspect and be on her guard, and distrust appearances, and remember the bitter lesson which had taught her that the deeds of the life, and not the words of the mouth, are the test by which we are to judge our fellow-creatures as well as ourselves.

And at the very time when Myra made this resolve to stand alone, she had such a yearning for guidance — visible, human guidance! It is a long time before we feel that prayer and God's help are sufficient for us; and though Myra prayed, and found comfort in prayer, she still longed intensely for some one to whom she might go, and, as she would herself

have expressed it, talk it all over, and ask what she should have done. One person there was to whom now, when one of the real trials of life had come upon her, she felt that she could have ventured, perhaps, to open her heart, but he was far away in spirit, though yet near her in the body, lingering on the borders of that silent land where the troubling of the wicked ceases, and the cares of the weary find rest.

It was in vain to think of talking to Dr. Kingsbury, and yet Myra could not resist the wish to see him once more, with perhaps the secret hope that if he had only rallied sufficiently to admit her to his room, he might say something from which she might find strength and comfort. When the dinner-bell rang, and she knew that everyone was engaged, and that Conyers was waiting upon her mother with a cup of coffee, she stole quietly away, leaving word with Juliet where she was to be found, and crossed the garden and the dell to the Rectory. How everything reminded her of Mr. Verney, and that first time when she had seen him, and of the way in which her feeling for him had grown up, and been strengthened by all the quiet strolls, the pleasant conversations, the ready sympathy which had made the last summer so indescribably pleasant to her! A man without honour, without principle, a deceiver, selfish, cold-hearted, treacherous! Oh! no, he was not that; he never could be that. Myra had stumbled upon the terrible fact of human inconsistency which

is the problem of the wisest through life, and must be so till death; and it occupied her thoughts till she found herself at the back-door of the Rectory, trembling and almost repenting of her visit, as she felt what the meeting with her old friends must be when such a tale was to be discussed, such folly in herself confessed, and such evil in others to be alluded to.

The kitchen door was gently opened by Betsey. "Is it you, Miss Myra? Master has been asking for you so many times."

"Has he indeed?" Myra's face brightened. "And is he better?"

"Ah! no; not better really, Miss. But he has wonderful strength to last so long. We thought this morning he was going, and so did Mr. Harrison. That was why we sent for Mr. Cameron. Master had something on his mind, he was so bent upon saying to him. I suspect it must have had to do with Mrs. Patty's affairs when he is gone. Very unfortunate it was as it turned out, but we could not help it. And now he has taken some arrow-root, and Faith says she should not be surprised if he was to last out the night. But he will be very glad to see you, Miss Myra. Oh dear! he has thought a great deal of you to-day." Betsey dared not express her sympathy more plainly, and Myra, shrinking from the least touch on the wounded spot, answered directly: "Please, Betsey, go and tell Mrs. Patty I am here, and ask if I may come up for a

minute. Tell her I must not be longer because of leaving mamma."

"Ah! Poor Mrs. Cameron! How is she?" asked Betsey, curiously.

"Pretty well, thank you. Please go quickly. I will sit down in the kitchen till you come back."

"Oh! no, Miss Myra; don't do that. Come up with me. I can be certain Mrs. Patty will be inclined to cry her eyes out with pleasure at seeing you. But here's Faith; she can tell us everything."

Faith brought word that "the Doctor was strangely better for the time, and had insisted upon being placed in his arm-chair by the fire, though it had been all they could do to get him there. He would be quite ready, she was sure, to see Miss Myra. He wanted sadly to hear all about it."

Again Myra felt as though a dagger had gone through her. It was the foretaste of a pang to be repeated many many times before she could be in the least accustomed to it. She followed Faith up the stairs, determined to be brave, and endure patiently whatever might be in store for her, for doubtless she in a measure deserved it.

But the first words of fatherly greeting which awaited her were calming as an opiate. The old Rector turned round his head quite quickly when the door opened, and a smile brightened up his withered features: "My little Myra, this is pleasant. I thank God that He has sent you. Patty, let

her come near to me; and I should like to see her alone."

"Surely, Doctor, dear. Come near the fire, Myra. You like the low seat, and you won't disturb him. He is better just now, and waiting quietly. We are both waiting," she added in an undertone.

"Dear Mrs. Patty, I have wanted to see you so much all day," said Myra, as she seated herself on the low stool by the Doctor, and turned her face up to look at Mrs. Patty.

"Ah! my dear, not half so much as I have wanted to see you." Mrs. Patty bent down and took Myra's face between her hands, and kissed her. "I have been sorry for a good many at the Hall to-day, but for none more than you. But tell the Doctor all you like, and if I think you are tiring him, I will come in and send you away."

"There is not much to be told that you don't know, sir;" said Myra, addressing the Doctor as Mrs. Patty went into the next room, and closed the door behind her. "You know that Rosamond is not married, and that Mr. Verney —"

"Is a villain," said the old man emphatically. But seeing Myra start, he added, "It sounds like a hard word, but it was a cruel deed to a young girl."

"Very cruel," said Myra, but she thought not of Rosamond, but of a broken heart in a distant land.

There was a slight pause. Then Myra added: "I was not free from blame myself."

"I heard it. Patty was told something about your knowing more than anyone else, but I was sure you must have been taken in. Young things like you have much to learn as to the ways of this evil world."

"But I might have learnt; I might have known," said Myra. "It was very wrong to help them to keep the engagement concealed, and that was what I did; but — I trusted Mr. Verney."

"No doubt, you did, my dear. All little girls of your age would have been likely to do so. But Myra" — the old man laid his withered hand upon hers as it rested on his knee, and his voice was tremulous in its earnestness — "Trust God and your own heart. It is the counsel of a dying man."

"My own heart! oh! never, never," exclaimed Myra.

"'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' My child, those are God's own Words.'"

"But I have been deceived," said Myra, "and I may be again."

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; did you do so?" He fixed his sunken eyes upon her, and Myra felt the glance thrill through her.

"Perhaps I did not," she said, hesitatingly.

"God knows if you did not, and how, and why you did not. He will pardon that sin, as He will all sin; only it must not be repeated."

"I deceived myself," exclaimed Myra. "God will not leave me to guide myself again; will He? Oh! sir, if He would only spare you."

"God will help you; do not doubt it. But He may not give you guidance — such as you seek."

"I shall never trust my own judgment," said Myra.

"A safe resolution, for you are young. Yet you must learn to trust it."

"By making blunders," said Myra, attempting to smile.

"Even so. By making blunders, and profiting by them. So it is we are all taught. Only there are some to whom the teaching comes very late," and the Doctor sighed heavily.

"You are tired, sir," said Myra, looking at him anxiously.

"A little. But wait, child; wait." He put out his hand to detain her, as she would have left him to summon Mrs. Patty. "One word more; you have to stand alone, my little girl."

"Yes, it seems so. Is it wrong to think it?"

"Face truth always. Never fear it." And in his earnestness, the Doctor half raised himself in his chair, and leaned forward. "You are alone; you want a right judgment. Take the experience of nearly eighty years. It is the balance of character

which through God's grace will give you that. Do you understand?"

"Not quite — I hope I do — I will try. But indeed" — again she would have left him, for his voice was faint, and a change had come over his face.

Still his detaining hand was lightly laid upon her. "The balance of character — proportion. No one fault, no one virtue even, allowed to get the upper-hand. It is the heart which leads the judgment astray. Oh God, do Thou help and tend her."

Myra knelt by his chair, and he murmured a few more words of prayer. Then he fell back suddenly.

Mrs. Patty looked in at the doorway, and Myra beckoned to her. She came and bent over him. "Doctor, dear."

He opened his eyes, and gazed at her, but there was something strange in his look.

"The mischief is at the heart," whispered Mrs. Patty; "he has had such an attack before. Ring the bell, my dear." She gave her orders with an unfaltering voice.

"And I made him talk," said Myra.

Mrs. Patty folded her hands together, and said quietly, "God's Will;" and then she stooped down and kissed the old man's forehead tenderly, and spoke his name.

He knew her quite, and smiled, but he did not

answer. Faith answered the bell, and Mr. Harrison was sent for.

"Shall you get him into bed?" asked Myra.

"He is more comfortable where he is. Doctor, dear, is there any pain?"

He shook his head.

"Thank God for that," said Mrs. Patty.

"Must I go?" asked Myra.

The old Rector just raised his hand, and his lips moved.

"She will stay, Doctor, dear. Yes, she will stay. Myra, it is what we must all come to."

Mrs. Patty was rigid in her self-control, but Myra's tears flowed fast. She continued kneeling at the Rector's feet, chafing his cold hands, but no warmth came to them.

Faith re-entered the room, and Betsey followed. They brought warm water and flannels, hoping to restore the circulation, but life was ebbing away fast. The old man spoke one word, which only Faith caught.

"He wants prayers, ma'am. Shall the curate come?"

"The commendatory prayer, Patty," was repeated again more distinctly.

"Doctor, dear, yes;" and Mrs. Patty opened the Prayer Book. She paused for one instant; her self-restraint entirely gave way, and she put the book into Myra's hands, and buried her face against the sofa.

And then, in the stillness of that death-chamber, the sweet young voice, though broken and faint, rose up to Heaven, commending to Almighty God the soul of him who had so long passed the term of man's appointed time on earth. It ceased, and in the pause which followed, the old Rector's voice was heard:

"Patty, there are many mansions."

"Doctor, dear, yes. There will be one for you."

"One for us both. Little Myra — take care of her. Jesus, Saviour — have mercy." A sigh, a short struggle, and it was all over.

CHAPTER XX.

A STILL autumn evening, with a most glorious sunset, steeping the atmosphere in a tint of unearthly reddish and golden brown, like the hues of the fading leaves etherealised; — the sky in the West a burnished mirror of clear transparent gold, with crimson clouds gathering round it; the East reflecting back the gorgeous light in masses of rose-coloured vapours, rising high in the heavens. Island mists floating upwards from the valley, and catching the sunset tints as they ascend, and far away to the south-west, soft scattered clouds hovering over the summit of a steep solitary hill, and descending upon it in forms like tongues of fire.

Mrs. Patty watched that sunset from the garden of her little cottage, at the end of the lane leading from the Rectory to the Hall. Myra stood by her side. They had both been silent for many minutes. At last Mrs. Patty spoke:

"The Doctor sees something more beautiful even than that, Myra, but I can't fancy it. Anyhow, he will be glad to think I have it to look at."

"Yes," said Myra. "It is always the sight that brings one nearest to heaven, is it not? dear Mrs.

Patty. I wish one might never be obliged to think of anything else."

"Which means you have something very earthly to talk about," said Mrs. Patty. "I knew you had by your face, but I could not bear to lose the sunset."

Myra drew a newspaper from under her cloak, and Mrs. Patty exclaimed "The 'Times!' certainly there is nothing more earthly than that."

"No," said Myra, gravely; "but look;" she pointed to a paragraph in the marriage advertisements.

"Read it, my dear;" said Mrs. Patty; "I can't find my spectacles."

"I would rather you should read it to yourself," said Myra. Her voice faltered, and she turned away.

Mrs. Patty searched again, brought out the spectacles, and advancing from the porch so as to gain all the advantage possible from the fading light, read half aloud: "At Vienna, October 20, Charlotte Mary Stuart, only daughter of George Stuart, Esq., of Bombay, to Charles Verney, Esq."

"Then he has done the right thing at last!" was Mrs. Patty's exclamation. "But poor thing! what a prospect of wretchedness for her."

"No wretchedness now, as far as this world is concerned," said Myra, drawing nearer. "See, Mrs. Patty;" again she pointed to the column of advertisements:

"At Vienna, four days after her marriage, Charlotte Mary, the beloved wife of Charles Verney, Esq."

The paper dropped from Mrs. Patty's hands.

"It was too late to save her," said Myra.

"Even so, too late," echoed Mrs. Patty. "God forgive me! I could almost pray that he might never know another happy moment."

"He will not know it," replied Myra. "Mrs. Patty, still I feel that there was once something noble about Mr. Verney."

"There might have been, my dear. No doubt there was. He is God's work, marred. But that he should have married that poor thing at last! I don't understand it."

"I think I do," said Myra. "It was impulse, and conscience."

"And a bit of the world too, my dear. He knew better than you know, that when a man marries, he places himself in a new position, and then people talk less about his old one. But with the money-matters all wrong! It was a desperate step."

"And now he is lonely, and poor, and miserable," said Myra.

Mrs. Patty looked at her keenly. "Myra, child, you are not going to waste your pity upon him. The Doctor would not approve of that." The allusion to the old Rector came out without effort. Mrs. Patty always spoke of him as conscious of her actions if not present with her.

"Would he not?" said Myra, and she half smiled. "Dear Mrs. Patty, he spoke more kindly of Mr. Verney than you ever did. But I waste no pity upon him, only I long to know whether, after this great shock, he will take a downward or an upward step."

"That depends upon why he married," said Mrs. Patty. "If he went to that poor thing boldly, told her what he had done, keeping back nothing, and then made his offer, with an honest purpose of devoting his life to her, the marriage may have been the turning point with him; and with this sorrow coming so soon, he may be a different man from henceforth."

"He would not tell her everything," said Myra. "He could not."

"Why, could not, child? Would not you have done it in his place?"

"Yes," said Myra, "but that would have been because I can never stop half way. Something always urges me on, if a thing is to be done, so that I cannot rest till it is done — fully, I mean. I don't think Mr. Verney has that feeling."

"He wants moral courage," said Mrs. Patty.

"So Mrs. Tracy said of him," replied Myra.

Mrs. Patty looked very grave. "Don't forget him in your prayers, Myra; for he will need them now more than ever."

"And you don't think he will improve, and grow better?" said Myra.

The words jarred upon her as she uttered them. How Mr. Verney would have smiled with contempt some few months before, if he had heard his little friend, Myra, speak of the possibility of his improving!

"I would rather not talk about him, Myra — or say what I think. The prophecy of an old woman must always sound harsh and hopeless to a young thing. I should like better to know how all is going on at the Hall with you."

"Well, I think," said Myra, "very well; only Rosamond is so altered. I cannot make her happy or satisfied, though I try to do so. And now she says such bitter things about people! She never used to do it. I always strive to remember, though, what she has had to make her bitter; but I am not much with her, for I have so many things to do."

"Ah! child, you have found your place now," said Mrs. Patty, smiling. "Papa's head, and mamma's right hand, and Rosamond's friend, and Juliet and Annette's example."

Myra's face flushed, as she exclaimed: "Oh! Mrs. Patty, no; not half that. But I wonder sometimes, when so many things go cross-wise, that I don't trouble myself about them more. I am contented at my heart always now, in spite of everything. Can that be because, as you say, I have found my place?"

"Possibly; or, may be, you have opened your eyes to see that you were already standing in it,

only you were not aware of it. As the Doctor used often to say: 'There is a place for everyone in this world, who chooses to give up self and live for others.'"

"They are all very kind to me at home," said Myra, thoughtfully. "Papa has quite forgotten now all the trouble at the wedding, and mamma tells me it always does her good when I go to her. I think that is partly owing to her not having Mrs. Verney with her as she used to have, and so being obliged to depend upon me more. There is a pleasure in feeling that one can stand alone, and be of use. I hope that is not conceited."

"I don't suppose truth ever made anyone conceited," replied Mrs. Patty. "You were more likely to be so, Myra, when you set your heart upon Mr. Verney."

"Not my heart," replied Myra. "It was more fancy and imagination than anything else which made me think of him as I did."

"That drew you together; but he was so clever, my dear, and you are clever too. I don't know how it is though, Myra, as I go on in the world, I think less and less of people who are merely clever. I remember what the Doctor used to say when I told him how everyone admired his learning: 'Patty, the little baby who has just waked up in paradise, is far wiser than the cleverest man now living.' It comforts me now to think of it, because I feel that when it shall please God to bring the Doctor and

me together again, I shall be better able to understand and help him."

"I don't want to lose you yet," said Myra, as she took her old friend's hand tenderly in her own.

"Perhaps not just yet, my dear. But it can't be very long. I am quite contented, though, to go or to stay. It is only waiting just a little while; and meantime nothing troubles me. When the day's care comes, it is already half over, and I am so much nearer the end — the blessed end."

"Yes," said Myra. "It must be pleasant to be old, to feel that."

"And pleasant too to be young, my dear; to be strong to fight the battle, and win the crown."

"But," said Myra, "one fears to be deceived, to go wrong — one cannot help fearing."

"I don't fear. No one would fear who knew you, Myra, as I do. I once heard the Doctor say he never trembled for those who leaned upon God, and then walked on boldly watching their own hearts, whatever blunders they might make. When he was afraid, it was for such as were always leaning upon human help. And that was why, Myra, it vexed me so to see you led by Mr. Verney. I felt sure that as long as you looked up to him, you would never know what it was to find your whole strength in God."

"I don't know it now as I ought," said Myra.

"And you won't know it, till you can look back, and see how He has forced you to turn from earthly

help, and so compelled you to rest on Him. A strange wonderful road it is that we all have to travel, Myra."

"I could wish for nothing better than that God would bring me as quietly and safely to the end, as He is bringing you," said Myra.

"And He will bring you there, my dear. Your way, perhaps, will not be as straight, and as pleasant as mine, because God has given you more to be anxious about, and you have a busy brain that won't be still, and take the world calmly. But step by step, hour by hour, day by day, never doubt, Myra, He will lead you. 'His rod and His staff will comfort you.' For surely, child, there is a prophecy for you, as well as a thanksgiving for me:

"Thy loving kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

There was a moment's silence. Then Myra said: "Is it only for me? Have you nothing to hope for Mr. Verney?"

And Mrs. Patty evasively replied: "The end is come, and the sun has set." And so they both went into the house.

We will take a glimpse of some in whom we may be interested, ten years after this period. And first of Mr. Verney. Mrs. Patty's doubtful words were not severe, they were prophetic. There are many men whose moral tone is kept up simply by

their position in society. Mr. Verney was one of these. When he lost fortune and gained a stained name, he sank inevitably.

The cowardice which had made him a prey to circumstances through the whole of his previous career accompanied him still. The catastrophe of the eventful wedding morning was the result of no premeditation. He had left Myra prepared to face his duty, and make his confession to Mr. Cameron; yet he procrastinated. Afraid to speak, he resolved to write, and went home for that purpose. But when he began to write, the sense of his humiliating position became overwhelming. Unable to justify himself, he felt himself, after many efforts, compelled to give up the attempt at extenuation, and after a night of utter misery, he found himself at half-past seven in the morning still unresolved what to do. In desperation he at length set out for the Hall, intending to leave the letter for Myra, and then escape the shame which awaited him by taking the railway train to London. But Time was his master. The train started at half-past eight, and by going to the Hall, he ran the risk of losing it. The note was given to the first person who presented himself, and events were left to take their course.

And in like manner with all which followed. His marriage was, as Myra suspected, a matter of impulse. He was degraded in his own eyes, and he rushed to the only person who he knew would cling

to him in spite of his degradation. He had made many miserable, and now that he was miserable himself, and had nothing more to lose, he could afford to make a sacrifice; not, indeed, the noble sacrifice of confession, that was the last thing Mr. Verney could think of; — he deceived even to the end; but he flattered himself that in keeping back all that had occurred, he was saving his wife from pain. He married, knowing that she was dying, but knowing also that by the act he was making her some atonement for a grievous wrong. For three days he dreamt, if not of happiness, yet of contentment; on the fourth his wife died from the effect of a shock produced by a letter unexpectedly revealing all that he had concealed from her.

And from that moment Mr. Verney began the downward course in which there is no need to follow him.

The habits from which his refined taste would have revolted when he was in prosperity, were resorted to as the only means of bringing forgetfulness of his folly in adversity; and ten years from the time when he first became acquainted with Myra, the only remark made about him by his Indian friends was, "That unhappy fellow Verney! what a wreck he is!"

And what of Rosamond? We may think of her as the wife of a man of rank and fortune, devoted to the world, but beginning to feel that the world is no longer devoted to her.

The brilliancy of very early youth past, and *ennui* rapidly stealing over her; no heart interests, no true affections, weary in her secret soul, and seeking to escape from weariness by a round of petty dissipation. Disappointed in her children because the faults which she had never checked in herself were exhibited in them, and clashed with her own inclinations; irritable with her husband because she had no principle of duty to make her obedient and forbearing with him. Friendless in the midst of friends; self still her idol, and self daily becoming more exacting, more tyrannous in its demands.

Hundreds there are like her:

"Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa."

And one last glimpse must be taken of Myra, married also; the wife of the eldest son of the same General Mainwaring who had talked politics with Mr. Verney, on the eventful night preceding the wedding-day. Yet the same Myra still — substantially the same. In no way altered so that anyone could say — "Is it possible to believe that Miss Cameron and Mrs. Mainwaring are the same persons?" A good wife and a good mother, for had she not been a good daughter and a good sister? A person of independent thought and clear judgment, exercising a wide and deep influence for good; for had she not early learnt to watch and govern her own mind, knowing that each individual

soul must give an account for itself, and can in nowise devolve its responsibility upon another? Impulsive still, quick in her movements, and never having learnt to be graceful, yet infinitely attractive from the sweet loving sympathy, the kindness which welled forth as from a never-failing fountain — the fountain of an unselfish heart. Quite simple, because living with one single motive — to do God service. So pure-minded, reverent, and earnest that her presence was a check upon every word that verged upon evil. Yet remarkable, but in one respect — that those who knew her best could never seize upon any one striking characteristic by which to describe her, until they fell back upon the cant phrase of the day, and said, "Myra Mainwaring is so true."

THE END.

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